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EXPLANATION

of the

Holy Rule of Carmel

in the form of

Meditations and Examens

by

Rev. Mother Mary of St. Peter
Prioress of the Carmel
of Arles

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY
THE DISCALCED CARMELITES
OF NEW ORLEANS

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FRANCISCUS LEO GASSLER

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St. Joseph's Church,
Baton Rouge, La., June 15, 1929.

Most Rev. J. W. Shaw, D. D.,
New Orleans, La.

Your Grace:

I have carefully read and studied the manuscript which Your Grace brought me last week, and which is entitled:

"Explanation of the Holy Rule of Carmel, in the form of Meditations and Examens, by Rev. Mother Mary of St. Peter, Prioress of the Carmel of Arles. Translated from the French by the Discalced Carmelites of New Orleans".

I am happy to state that I read these meditations with great pleasure and edification. To call this work a "translation" does not state the truth entirely, for the translator has worked the matter over and presented it in a real English dress, entirely free from solecisms such as are found in every language. On the contrary, the translator has found the equivalent in our language to give form to those sublime thoughts.

May I remark that my official task of reading the manuscript, became to me a most grateful task, because the contents of that manuscript are so consoling and edifying that they supplied me with the choicest points for my own meditation. With Abbe Tallet I say that "these pages, from beginning to end, contain a sure doctrine". I most cheerfully endorse his statement.

May the "Explanations", now accessible in an English dress, bring untold blessings and consolations to those whose eyes will be privileged to scan the pages of that wonderful book.

With kindest regards and best wishes, I remain,

Your Grace's humble servant in Xto.,

F. L. GASSLER,
Cens. Lib.

Very Rev. Mother Prioress:—

We learn with genuine pleasure that this dear Carmel of New Orleans, where we are today staying for a short time, has already translated from the French language and is about to have printed a work entitled the “*Explication de la sainte Règle du Carmel*”.

I am fully convinced, Rev. Mother, that the precious volume will be received gladly by all our dear Carmels in America and will do there a great deal of good. During our visit of the Monasteries we were able, to our great satisfaction, to see and affirm how exactly our holy Rule is observed and with what great solicitude they endeavor to practise it with ever growing perfection in all its little particulars. Hence, a large explanation in the form of meditations on our holy Rule will be of the greatest help to all these our dear Sisters in America in order to observe it with the highest perfection.

With this sincere wish, Rev. Mother, I bless your work and beseech our Lord and our Queen of Carmel to assist and protect this beloved Monastery and all its happy inmates.

Fr. William of St. Albert,
Prep. Genl.

New Orleans, Feast of the transverberation of the heart
of our holy Mother St. Teresa, Aug. 27, 1929.

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INTRODUCTION

In the magnificent portrait of the valiant woman by which the Sacred Writer terminates his Book of Proverbs we seem to see revive again the features of the author of this book, our venerated Mother Mary of St. Peter, born de Sermet de Tournefort.

Having been Prioress of this Monastery during twelve years, she directed its restoration. Notwithstanding this difficult labor and the many duties of her office, she showed herself full of foresight in order to enrich her Religious family with true wealth. We may say of her "that she arose while it was yet night and gave food to her household. She stretched forth her hand to hard things, and her fingers have taken hold of the distaff. She feared not the cold nor the snow for her household, for all her servants are covered with double garments." (Proverbs of Solomon, Chap. XXXI).

In effect, she not only spun with her fingers the wool and the linen for the service of the holy Altar, and for the needs of the Community, but, admirably gifted for intellectual labor, she applied herself thereto unceasingly; and from her pen came forth, for the benefit of her children, teachings truly worthy to be handed down to posterity.

The most important of her writings is the one which we here publish under the title: "Explanation of the Holy Rule of Carmel, in the form of Mediations and Examens." It is a spiritual treasure from which we may draw as much for the formation of Novices as for the guidance of souls most advanced in the ways of the contemplative life.

Although her style has the charms which mark the not brilliant authors of our day, we have not wished to retouch it. Is it not preferable to allow our Mother to appear such as she really was, such as were the pious writers of her time, diffuse in relating things over and over again in order to be the better understood?

We must also say that she never took the time to com-

pose studied phrases: the pages of her manuscript written on the inspiration of the moment, bear no trace of erasure.

Neither have we touched upon the Examens, in which she points out minutely all the imperfections which are an obstacle to the supernatural life. To those who may be tempted to see themselves there portrayed, we reply as did Massillon to one who asked him how he had acquired so clear a view of the faults to which the human heart is inclined: "I only have to descend into my own heart."

This is what Mother Mary of St. Peter did daily, from her most tender years when she learned from her father the necessity of reflecting, of judging herself severely, and of acknowledging her faults sincerely. Later on, she taught nothing that she did not practise. This is why her theory, as well as her love of God, was invariably established upon the immovable basis of the knowledge of herself and of the most profound humility.

For a long time, many Religious of Carmel and of several other Orders encouraged our publication; we delayed however, in order that it might not supercede the treatise of our Ven. Fr. John of Jesus Mary upon the same subject. Would not this work, translated into our language, render superfluous the one of our venerated Mother? This was the question which presented itself, and so we waited.

The "Exhortations" of our Venerable Father are to-day spread throughout all our Monasteries; we enjoy them much, but it is permitted to hope that, although very different in style and form, these two works will go on their way without rivalry, each bringing forth fruits of salvation.

We thus proceed, encouraged by the confidence which we feel that our publication will be very agreeable to God and very useful to souls. As to the rest, we but fulfill a duty of filial piety in preserving the writings of our Mother: "Her Sons rose up and called her blessed. . ."— "Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her at the gates of the city." They speak louder than all other discourse; this is why we leave the care of

appreciating their merits to those whom we know will gladly welcome them.

This book, in crossing the threshold of the Cloister, carries with it the blessings of our holy Archbishop and his approbation, accompanied by that of the learned theologian by whom his Grace had it examined. These two documents are followed by a Biographical Sketch of our venerated Mother, borrowed from the Circular by which her death was announced to all the Monasteries of Carmel in France.

From our Carmel of the Most Holy Heart of Mary,
on the Feast of her glorious Assumption

Arles, Aug. 15, 1896

APPROBATION OF HIS GRACE, MONSIGNOR
GOUTHE-SOULARD

Archbishopric of Aix, Arles, Enbrun

Aix, Oct. 1, 1895.

According to the appreciation given below, which We judge to be sure and competent, We authorize the publication of the manuscript entitled: "Explanation of the Holy Rule of Carmel, in the Form of Meditations and Examens, by Rev. Mother Mary St. Peter, Prioress of the Carmel of Arles." And We earnestly recommend the reading of it to those pious souls who wish to become perfect in the ways of salvation, and to please God in all their works.

Xavier, Archbishop of Aix.

LETTER OF THE ABBE TALLET

Aix, Oct. 1, 1895

My Lord,

I finished reading the manuscript: "Explanation of the Holy Rule of Carmel, in the Form of Meditations and Examens, by Rev. Mother Mary of St. Peter, Prioress of the Carmel of Arles," which your Grace gave me to examine.

These pages, from beginning to end, contain a sure doctrine. They are calculated to produce great good, as well among the simple faithful as among Religious Communities. They teach, with clearness and simplicity, the science and the practice of true piety, and a true love of God.

I earnestly hope that, being published, they may spread as soon as possible for the utility and the edification of Christian souls.

Deign to accept, my Lord Bishop, etc.

M. Tallet.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Josephine Julie de Sermet de Tournefort was born at Lyons of a Christian family which had been forced to fly from its native land in consequence of revolutionary troubles.

By a very singular circumstance, she saw the light of day in the Cell of a Convent formerly inhabited by a Religious Community which the misfortunes of the times had dispersed.

Brought back to Provence, the original home of her family, she lost her mother at an early age; and her father, in his deep sorrow, wished for no other consolation than that of devoting his care and labor to the education of his two daughters, who were always the dearest objects of his affection.

He retired with them to the country; and it was there that Julie received from him the simple and solid education which was to be the basis of the high perfection which, day by day she was attaining. Happily gifted with a good memory and an understanding beyond her age, she responded to the cares of her father, and even surpassed his hopes. Each evening he made her give him an account of the employment of her day, as he required also of her sister, three years younger than herself. They accused themselves of the faults which they had committed and received for them a sweet and wise correction; they had no other desire than that of pleasing their good father, no other affections than those of their family, no other pleasures than those which they found in the simple amusements of the country, no other joys than those which experienced before the Altars of our Lord and of the Blessed Virgin.

Julie made her First Communion in the Church of the village. Her father, who prepared her for this great act, required of her practices of virtue and dispositions as perfect as those which one would bring to acts the most holy of a life entirely consecrated to

God. From this time the piety of the young girl gained fresh ardor.

The whole country round, already very much edified at the good she had been doing from her earliest years, henceforth, saw in her an accomplished model of Christian perfection.

She loved the poor and gave them alms; great was her happiness to work at making garments for them and to prepare remedies for the relief of their ills.

When she had attained her seventeenth year, M. de Sermet was called to fulfill an honorable charge in the city of Arles. He established himself there with his daughters, and there formed for them a society which, far from destroying the fruits of their first education, only served to perfect it. It was in the midst of this agreeable intercourse that they became aware of the religious vocation of which Julie herself had never dreamed, feeling rather drawn to devote her whole life to her much beloved father, who had made for her such generous sacrifices.

What progress might not be expected from a soul naturally so elevated! A great and generous heart, a superior mind and a remarkable maturity of judgment, were the elements upon which the Hand of the Lord built the edifice of her perfection.

The society of the young persons who surrounded her soon became a school of every virtue. Julie de Sermet was not only their friend, but their guide, their model and their support. Numbers among them owed to her, in great part, the religious virtues which rendered them the ornament and edification of the different Houses of the Sacred Heart in which Providence afterwards placed them.

The Chateau de St. Pierre, (1) where Julie and her sister had been raised, became, during their vacations, another sanctuary in which, alone with God, they tasted all the more the happiness of belonging to Him. They had the consolation of having Mass there, and even of having the Blessed Sacrament there reserved. When in the evening they were obliged to retire, a little grating placed in the alcove of their apartment, still gave them an opportunity of entertaining them-

(1) Situated in the district of "la Tour d'Aigue". (Vancluse.)

selves with our Lord in the Most Holy Sacrament. Their exercises of piety were regulated, as was also the employment of their entire day. Nourished constantly with the Bread of Angels, supported by the exercise of prayer and spiritual reading, their life resembled rather that of the Cloister than that of the world. Oh! who can tell all the graces that Julie received in that holy asylum, and the good which she did to so many souls who had the happiness of seeing and of hearing her, who, by her example and her lessons, were afterwards to make wonderful progress in the spiritual life!

However, it was not always by consolations and sensible graces that God testified His love for His faithful servant. The sight of her sins, which she considered with the eyes of the Saints, and the thought of the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ, produced in her soul an impression which kept her always united to God by sentiments of reparation and of love.

A life so edifying to all who witnessed it, so useful to many souls, so opposed to the maxims of the world, and which the world itself admired from afar—a life in which the fervent Religius could be able to find a model, it seems should have been capable of satisfying the desires of Mlle. de Sermet to procure the glory of God and her own sanctification. But, since the world has been bought by the Blood of a God, elect souls, who spend themselves through love for the Cross, never say: “It is enough.” Other sacrifices, and another kind of immolation, were necessary in order to satisfy the need of this great heart. Carmel presented itself to her view, and fixed her choice irrevocably. But a divine vocation like hers must be tried by rude combats, before its day of triumph can dawn. During five years she had to struggle against obstacles which seemed insurmountable, and which perhaps would have been so for a soul less strong and generous. The tenderness of a cherished father to whom she owed her gratitude and attention appeared to be a legitimate link to retain her. Moreover, a sister, to whom she served as mother and guide in the ways of God, claimed the counsel and direction

which she alone could give. Priests the most worthy, who had been consulted in this important affair, were unanimously of the opinion that she could not yet leave the paternal home. Even more admirable, perhaps, by her patience and her abandonment at the delay of her projects than in her sacrifice, this humble and submissive soul knew how to profit by every instant of her long trial without allowing her courage to be shaken or her least duties to suffer in consequence. She offered herself to God in the spirit of a victim; but she did not wish for any other immolation than that which He Himself chose for the time being, and thus by practice she prepared herself for the abnegation of the Cloister.

In 1830, M. de Sermet resigned the post which he occupied at Arles and returned to his country home, where so many remembrances and so much affection caused new combats in the heart of his elder daughter. Always superior to herself, in the midst of the contradictions which God seemed to sow in her path, Mlle. de Sermet said to Him one day, in the simple and child-like language of her love and faith: "Ah well, my God, we shall see who shall leave off sooner, You to contradict me, or I to love Your contradictions!" Her confidence in this good Master was so much the more meritorious because, humanly speaking, she could not see an end to her long waiting. One of her friends, aspiring like herself to Carmel, said to Julie that, unlike her, she had the promise of her parents' consent at a determined epoch: "Ah well," replied Julie to her, "my cause is more advanced than yours, since I have no hope but in God, Who alone has charge of my interests." In effect, Providence did not delay to furnish her with the occasion of answering the Divine Call.

Her sister, tried by physical suffering and very great interior trials, understood that she could consent to the separation of her who, until then, had been so necessary to her soul; and, too generous to seek her own satisfaction, she no longer opposed her departure. On the other side, grace spoke louder than ever to the heart of the future postulant in regard to her father; she felt that he had sufficient strength,

virtue and faith to recognize the Will of God in their separation. From that time, this Will appeared to her so clear that, without hesitating, she seized a favorable opportunity, which facilitated her departure, and fled to Carmel. The consequences of this step proved that she had followed the direction of the Holy Spirit; and this sacrifice, the greatest, without doubt, that her father could offer to God, put, so to speak, the last touches to the work of his perfection.

Upon entering Religion, she received the name of Sr. Mary of St. Peter, which she accepted blindly, for such was not the one of her choice. Admitted to the Novitiate, all saw her walk with a firm and rapid step in the path of virtue.

Never did postulant show herself more humble, more simple, more courageous, more obedient and more fervent. It seemed impossible to believe, in seeing her act, that she had just left a social position in which she had not only commanded others but also taught that of which she, herself, now appeared ignorant. She felt happy in a pathway strewn with thorns, and her gaiety was the charm of the Community. Very soon several employments were confided to her, and everywhere she showed herself only a novice by her entire dependence. Eight days after her entrance into religion her obedience was put to a trial which showed her virtue and entire disengagement from creatures. Her Mother Prioress was sent to a foundation, where she remained some time. The Religious charged to replace her in quality of Superior, found in Sr. St. Peter the same respect, the same dependence, because she ever saw only God in authority. And so arrived the time of her Profession which she so greatly desired—that day of ineffable happiness and of superabundant graces of which Heaven alone knows the secret.

The restricted limits of this sketch do not permit us to enter into details; a tree is known by its fruits, and the works of this true Religious speak louder than any words of ours. Successively Mistress of Novices, Sub-prioress, Prioress and Depositary, she showed herself in all these different offices to be a soul entirely devoted to her God, desiring to immolate her-

self with Him for the salvation of souls whom He had confided to her, sincerely despising herself, convinced of her own weakness, and always strong with strength from on high.

In the space of ten days she lost her sister and her father; this double blow, so hard to bear, found her full of courage and faith. Their death, a sweet echo of their life which was a model of all virtues, was that of the Saints.

Mother St. Peter joined to a cultivated mind an uncommon facility for all kinds of labor; she gave herself up as easily to intellectual labors as to works the most delicate and the most wearisome. She wrote very well. Apart from the explanation of our Holy Rule which we here publish, we owe to her "Meditations for a Retreat of Ten Days" and other very precious writings which perfectly express the sentiments and the desires which animated her for the perfection of her daughters.

Attacked by the malady which was eventually to take her away from the affection of her dear Community, she supplied by her industry for her want of strength. Not being able to go to the parlor, she wrote, and thus attended to all business affairs. From her bed of sickness she also continued her maternal vigilance in regard to all the needs of her children.

For a long time she had supported in silence a thousand ills which destroyed, little by little, her strong constitution. But at last, notwithstanding her zeal and her love for the Cross, she was forced to accept the reliefs which her state required. On February 6, 1849, she was obliged to take to her bed. The Physician from that time declared that the illness endured for so long a time, presented very grave symptoms.

The Superiors having been obliged to delay the Elections through circumstances independent of their will, Mother St. Peter continued, according to custom, to fulfill the charge of Prioress by commission. God willed, no doubt, by this new trial, to increase the merits of this soul who sighed after the day when,

being again under obedience, she should have nothing more to do but to suffer in silence the pains with which she was overwhelmed.

At last the day for the Elections arrived which gave as Prioress to the Convent of Arles the venerated Mother Mary of the Conception, a professed Religious of Aix, and a childhood friend of our Mother St Peter. Immediately after the Elections the dear patient wrote with her own hand two letters to the new Prioress, which breathe forth sentiments of faith, of submission, and of happiness. They were for the Carmel of Aix a great subject of edification and of devotion.

Relative to her installation at the Carmel of Arles, Mother Mary of the Conception later wrote the following lines concerning Mother St. Peter: "With what transports of joy did she not receive us at the moment of our arrival in this holy house! I shall never forget the welcome which this beloved Mother gave us! Kneeling upon her bed, her eyes bathed in tears, she threw herself in our arms, begging our blessing like the humblest of novices, assuring us that she was cured, that she no longer felt any pain, but was at perfect ease. It is certain that during some days there was a sensible improvement in her state; she could rise, go to recreation in a rolling chair, and receive Holy Communion at the grating of the Infirmary."

Nevertheless the malady continued its ravages, but grace was victoriously finishing its work. Soon changes were made in the house; she approved of all with a joy and a tranquillity of soul which made us admire her great spirit of faith as well as her sincere disengagement from all things of earth.

Considering her Mother Prioress as a visible Angel sent to strengthen her in the combat, she had her called at the least sign of interior trouble or weakness. Confiding everything to her, she abandoned herself to her decisions with docility and confidence.

"During the octave of the Assumption," continues Mother Mary of the Conception, "Mother St. Peter was very ill and received the Last Sacraments, after which

she never rose again; the swelling and the weight of her body reduced her to an immovable state, in which she could say with St. Paul: 'I die daily.' " Asking her what she thought of her state: 'Nothing,' she answered me, 'I should fear, if I considered it too closely, to incline to one side or the other, whereas, I wish to let God act.' If we testified to her any regret at not seeing her in our midst on some great feast, or for some ceremony, she would reply: 'It seems to me that this little Calvary on which God has placed me supplies for all things else. I see myself between three graces: death, but that is too much happiness—it seems to me that the work of God is not yet finished in me; recovery, but I should be too happy to follow the Community, living under obedience; finally suffering, and this is the grace which the good Master grants me. He knows well that I have desired to make my purgatory in this world. Oh, how good He is!' The Doctor tried to relieve her by incisions in the limbs. She hardly showed that she felt them. As he hesitated to renew them, she said to him: 'Act as if it were a wooden leg; if I make any involuntary movement, do not mind it. When he seemed to consult her, because he feared he was making her suffer, she would reply: 'It is all the same to me; it belongs to you, Doctor, to employ the means that you believe useful. I can never suffer more than God wills.' "

For a second time Mother St. Peter seemed to regain her strength; but the gangrene was not long in manifesting itself in the wounds made in the limbs, thus to her already desperate state were joined still more cruel sufferings. The dear invalid found all positions unbearable. One day the Sister Infirmarian, after having tried many means in order to relieve her, asked her how she felt: "Well enough," she answered, "in order that the designs of God may be accomplished." Whenever her pains increased she would say: "There still remains something to be done; the good God knows it well, let Him finish His work." It is thus that she accomplished this point of the Constitutions of Carmel: "That the Sisters should show in sickness the virtue they have acquired in health."

Detached from all things she could say in truth: "Thou hast broken my bonds, I will offer to Thee a sacrifice of praise." Acts of thanksgiving were always upon her dying lips; and her soul seemed to gain new vigor in proportion as the holocaust was consumed before the Divine Majesty.

On Saturday, December 29th, seeing that her end approached, the Superior of the Community, in whom she had great confidence, heard her confession, and on that same evening she received the Holy Viaticum for the fifth time. After she could retain no nourishment, but rejected it with incredible efforts. As this contraction of the stomach drew from her involuntary cries, she would say: "I mean by this to repeat my fiat until the end." She then gave herself up to the hope of going very soon to possess her God. Death appeared very sweet to her, and her sufferings of small account. "Oh, how sweet it is," she would say, "to have been deprived of consolations during life, since one finds them all at the hour of death!" When they asked her if she suffered any pain, she answered: "If I had one, it would be that of not having any"

During the last four days of her life the Sisters in turn pressed around her to receive her last counsels. "I should desire nothing better for you," she said to one of those who recommended herself to her prayers, "than that you may find yourself at the hour of death in the same state in which I am." She would ask if the profound calm which her soul enjoyed was not an illusion. Following, so to say, from one moment to another, the progress of her own destruction, she said: "In a short while God will dissipate this dust; and there will remain in me only what is of Him." Another time, she said: "How well I understand the emptiness of the creature and the reality of God. I see myself as a mere cypher which is going to join itself to Unity. Formerly, I regarded my actions in themselves; today all has disappeared except the Divine Mercy." Her pains were so great that she would often repeat: "O my God! if it were not for You Who sustains me, I could not bear it"

On Monday night, December 31st, the Superior

who returned to give her the Apostolic Benediction, said to her upon entering her cell: "This is the moment of combat; we must not lay down our arms." "No, certainly not, my Father," replied the dear agonizing Mother, "not until after the victory." Her voice, almost extinct, seemed to gain new strength in order to thank God for His graces, and to offer herself to Him in a spirit of sacrifice and for His glory. "His glory! His glory! His glory!" she cried out three times a moment before her death. Her agony lasted six hours during which, preserving her consciousness, she took the blessed candle herself, and renewed her vows; then having received the blessing of her Prioress, she again testified her joy at dying under obedience. Desiring to change her position, she said: "It is in order to breathe with more facility, and not to hasten, through my own fault, the moment of my death. I do not wish to suffer a moment less than God wills." She followed all the prayers for the agonizing, smiling as she penetrated the meaning of the words.

At eleven o'clock at night she lost consciousness; and half an hour later all had ended for her here below.

Thus flew to Heaven, crowned with merits, this valiant soul, worthy daughter of our Seraphic Mother St. Teresa. It was the 1st of January, 1850.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATION
UPON
OUR HOLY RULE

Text: *The Primitive Rule of St. Albert, Patriarch of Jerusalem.*

What esteem should we not have for our holy Rule, since by nourishing ourselves with it we live according to God Who is the only Life proper to our souls, for he who lives according to the Rule lives according to God. But to live this life it is necessary to penetrate to the depth of this Rule and to draw from it that spiritual and divine sap with which we ought to nourish our souls, and it is by mediation that we shall attain this end.

Let us then try to excite within ourselves an esteem and a love for this Rule by the consideration of its sanctity; let us not be content with this, but pass on to practice, and consider how necessary it is for us to meditate upon the Rule in order to love it and to observe it exactly in a spirit of faith; in fine, let us seek the means for meditating upon it with fruit, by considering what methods are most efficacious for this purpose. To resume all we have said: the sanctity of the Rule, the necessity of meditation upon the Rule, the means of meditating with fruit—these are the three points with which we are going to occupy ourselves in this consideration.

FIRST POINT
Sanctity of the Rules.

Our Rules are holy in their institution and in their effects. 1st—They come from God, their institution is divine; they are then holy, as are all things which come from God. 2nd—They lead us straight to God, and make us live by God; they are then holy, since by following them we sanctify ourselves and unite ourselves to the Holy of Holies. Let us then try to develop these two propositions.

First, our Rules are holy in their institution, because they come from God, and all that comes from God is

good and holy. When He created the world and assigned laws to His creatures, God considered His works and said that they were good.

We shall not undertake to prove that God has the right to give rules to His creatures; the thing is too evident. Who should have the right if not the Creator? God not only could give laws to all things, and regulate them according to His holy Will, but He was obliged to do so; His Wisdom and His Justice so willed it; and this is what He did at the beginning of the world, so that each creature in coming forth from His Eternal Mind appeared with the rules which were proper to it, and which were to be observed exactly until the Sovereign Legislator Himself ordained otherwise, either for a time, or altogether, as He judged proper.

From all time God has given laws to His people, either directly by the ministry of Angels, or by those among men to whom He declared His Will. Thus we see that He Himself traced out for our first parents what He wished them to observe; it was the same with Noah, Abraham and Moses, who were afterwards charged to transmit His laws to His People.

Lastly, the Sovereign Legislator, the Word of God, descended upon earth with authority and a divine mission to abolish the Old Law and to announce the New. It was Jesus Who taught this law by His words and by His examples; all that He did, all that He said, (which ought to have the force of law for us,) is gathered together by His Disciples who wrote the Holy Gospel. This precious deposit is confided to the Church which Jesus has taken for His Spouse and for the Confidant of His secrets; to whom He has given His authority, His power and His Spirit in order to interpret His laws and to have them executed; and whose infallibility He has Himself proclaimed, assuring us that the gates of Hell shall never prevail against her.

Let us now see if our holy Rules have not emanated from God like the laws of which we have just spoken: it will be easy to assure ourselves of this. To whom have they been inspired? To Saints, to privileged souls whom God filled with His graces and His favors: St.

Pacomius, St. Basil, St. Albert, St. Brocard, our holy Mother St. Teresa, our holy Father St. John of the Cross, etc. Whence are they drawn? From the Book by excellence, the Book of books, I mean to say the Holy Gospel, where we find Jesus, with His words, His actions, His spirit. . . Again, whence are they drawn? From the Epistles of St. Paul who declared that he knew only Jesus Crucified, and from the other books of the Holy Scriptures. Again, whence? From the infallible decisions of the Church and the Holy Councils. Whence, in fine, have our regulations and all the instructions which have been given us as rules of Religious perfection, been drawn? From the writings and examples of the Holy Fathers and Founders of Religious Orders, the Monks and Hermits, with whom God communicated with so much familiarity.

By whom are they approved? By the Church, which is holy and infallible; by our Holy Father, the Pope, the visible Head and Representative of our Lord Jesus Christ. Does not all this suffice to prove that our Rules are holy and divine in their institution, and to excite us to conceive a great esteem for them?

I have also said that our Rules are holy in their effects; let us try again to convince ourselves of this. Since they come from God it is certain that they are the expression of His Will; now the Will of God is always holy and upon its accomplishment depends our sanctity; so that the effect produced in us by our exactitude in following our holy Rules, is sanctity.

God has enclosed in our Rules all the means necessary for sanctifying us and leading us to Himself; thus we find in them the light, the nourishment, the arms, the chains, the ramparts and the titles we must have in order to be received among the Saints. The effects which our Rules produce are: to enlighten our souls in order to aid them to know the way of sanctity and to walk securely therein; to nourish them during this wearisome voyage with the food wherewith our Savior was nourished—the Will of His Heavenly Father; to deliver them from a multitude of enemies and to defend them against the attacks of those who obstinately pursue us; and this is what they have done by separating us from the world, by despoiling us of ourselves through mortification, and by

giving us as an armor, faith, confidence in God, charity, and the practice of all the religious virtues which curb our passions, overcome the demon, submit the flesh to reason and the reason to God. Our Rules bind us to God, and we can say with the Apostle St. Paul: "I am in bonds for Christ." Sweet and blessed chains, composed of links of gold, which God holds in His Hand at one extremity, enjoining us to seize the other and to mount to Him by passing from one link to another. This is what we do by the practice of the regular exercises, and the virtues and Vows of Religion; that is to say, in accomplishing the Will of God expressed by all these things, we mount, link by link, till we reach the consummation of sanctity; and this chain shall serve throughout all eternity to glorify the thrice Holy God, Who, by it, will have drawn us to Himself.

Again, our Rules are ramparts which preserve us from the attacks of our enemies. The weapons of the demons, of the world and our own domestic enemies are broken into pieces against the Rule, so that the Religious soul, when tempted, finds a shelter and a place of security in her Rule, since God encloses Himself therein to serve for her defense.

Our Rules are our titles of sanctity, in as much as they are the expression of the Will of God, and the accomplishment of this Divine Will ought to conduct us to sanctity. Undoubtedly, the soul who can present to God, at the end of her course, the faithful practice of her Rule, will have need of no other title in order to be proclaimed holy by the whole celestial court, each member of which reached Heaven only by his fidelity in walking according to the Will of God. From this point of view, we can well say that our Rules are, in this life, an anticipated Heaven, since they keep us incessantly united to the good pleasure of God, and without this nothing can render us happy either in Heaven or on earth. Finally, to conclude, let us consider the multitude of Saints who attained happiness and the glory of sanctity by their fidelity in observing our holy Rules; and who are so much the more holy in proportion as they have been more faithful in studying them, in penetrating their meaning, in following their light, in nourishing themselves with their spirit, in perfecting themselves by their practice, in living only accord-

ing to them, and rendering themselves, through them, conformable to our Lord Who nourished Himself with the Will of His Heavenly Father and Who accomplished the law even to the smallest detail.

SECOND POINT.

The Necessity of Meditating Upon the Rules.

St. Bonaventure says that the highest degree of perfection is to observe all that the Rule prescribes; now, in order to observe all that the Rule prescribes it is necessary to know this Rule perfectly in all its details, expressed and understood; it is necessary to understand the sense and the spirit of it, and it is then that we live by God and that we attain the highest degree of perfection.

In order to understand perfectly all that the Rule prescribes, it is necessary to study it thoroughly, for we do not know truly what we see only superficially. It is then, upon this study, more or less profound, that the degree of our knowledge depends, and whence flows the esteem and the affection which leads to perfect practice, the only way which conducts to sanctity. Thus, in order to practise it perfectly, we must love all that the Rule prescribes; in order to love it we must know it; and in order to know it we must study it. God alone has the perfect knowledge of all things without study and without labor.....Our intelligence is limited; it can conceive things thoroughly only by force of application. On the other hand, that which is most beautiful, most essentially divine and most practical in our holy Rules is so hidden that we can discover it only by diving profoundly into them through meditation; how then can we be able to practise perfectly all that they contain without meditating assiduously upon them? Generally speaking, all that is most beautiful and most precious in the order of nature, as in the order of grace, is found hidden under coarse coverings and allows itself to be discovered only at the price of laborious efforts. If we desire gold or silver we must dig into the depths of the earth, and submit these metals to many preparations in order to purify them and make them fit for use.

It is also in the earth and under a coarse appearance that the most precious stones are found, and it is only

after much labor that one succeeds in making them sparkle. It is in the depths of the sea, at the peril of life, that the fine pearl is found hidden in its shell.

It is the same in the order of grace; if we wish to find treasures and enrich ourselves with them, it is by force of labor, by meditation, by plunging ourselves into renunciation, abjection, etc. . . . If we wish to participate in the riches hidden in the Heart of Jesus, we must pass through His poverty, His humiliations and His sufferings.

Again, it is the same with our holy Rule; if we wish to find the treasures which it contains, it is necessary to dig down to its very depths; the letter is only the rind which contains the spiritual substance in which we find life; it is then necessary to break this rind by meditation in order to get this nourishment, for the letter kills—it is the spirit that vivifies. If we wish then to observe all that the Rule prescribes, and by this means to fly towards perfection, (according to the expression of our holy Mother St. Teresa, who says, that a Religious, faithful to the observance of the least detail of the Rule, does not walk, but flies towards perfection,) we must necessarily meditate upon it seriously and assiduously. This work is for the soul, what for the body, is the action of preparing and digesting the food suitable to its constitution; so that, to read and to practise only the letter of the Rule would not be more profitable to our soul than it would be to the body to look at and to touch food without preparing, eating or digesting it. Let us then not neglect so necessary a work, one upon which our perfection depends.

Since God has willed to hide Himself in our Rules, it is because He wishes us to seek Him there. Should we not be senseless to neglect to seek so precious a treasure until we have found it, knowing already where it is? Alas, how many poor souls there are who would wish to know where God is, and who know not where to look for Him! How many who seek Him where He is not—for them! And we who know where He is for us, and are sure of finding Him, if we wish to take the pains of seeking Him, shall we deprive ourselves, by our negligence and tepidity, of such great but hidden riches?

THIRD POINT.

How Should We Meditate Upon Our Holy Rules?

Since we can by no means dispense ourselves from meditating upon our holy Rules and since we are resolved to give ourselves entirely to this work, let us seek out the best manner for doing it well.

1st—In order to meditate upon the Rules with fruit, it is necessary to have a right disposition, simple and generous, which allows the Holy Spirit to enlighten our understanding, to inflame our will and excite it to the love and perfect practice of the Rules.

2nd—We must meditate in the Presence of God, causing the faculties of our soul to act under the influence of His grace.

3rd—We must meditate upon them assiduously, by examining them attentively from all sides, and consider them from all those points of view which can facilitate for us the acquisition of a profound as well as a practical knowledge of them.

4th—We must meditate with order and method, so that the light which we receive may be more abundant and the fruits more salutary and more lasting.

I. I have said in the first place that uprightness, simplicity and generosity are necessary dispositions for meditating well upon the Rules. Uprightness seeks God alone in the Rules, simplicity sees and finds Him there; generosity attaches and unites itself to Him by the practice of the perfection which it there discovers. We find these dispositions expressed by the words of the Royal Prophet: "I will render Thee thanks for having given me an upright heart and for having instructed me in Thy holy ordinances; I will keep them, provided Thou doth not abandon me. . . . Teach me, Lord, the ways of Thy Commandments, and I will apply myself to follow them always; give me intelligence, in order that meditating upon Thy Law, I may attach myself with all my heart to its observance. . . . Incline my heart to the love of Thy Law and render it insensible to the love of created goods." Let us borrow these dispositions of the holy King; let us seek God alone in the study and in the practice of our holy Rules, and intelligence, strength, courage, and energy

will be given to us, as it was given to him; for, Our Lord will not allow Himself to be outdone in generosity, and He opens for him who knocks.

II. Secondly, we must meditate upon the Rules under the Eye of God, cause all the faculties of our soul to act in His Presence and under the double influence of His grace. Generally, we do carefully and with success what we do under the eyes of a cherished father by whom we are loved, and to whom we wish to give pleasure. The Eye of God is upon us, and with much stronger reason should it produce this effect upon our works; and the work that we do in His Presence, with the dispositions that we have just pointed out, cannot but be fruitful, if we employ therein all the faculties of our soul according to the degree of capacity which God has given to them. It is true that sin has, unhappily, considerably weakened and obscured these noble faculties of the soul; but it is also true that when we do what is in our power in order to cause them to act according to the designs which Our Lord proposed to Himself in giving them to us, this good God supplies what is wanting to them, and the influence of His grace gives them understanding to perceive and facility to act. We should not then remain idle under pretext of incapacity; let us labor under the Eye of God according to our power, however little it may be; let us unite our understanding and our will to His divine Intelligence and His adorable Will, and we shall receive through this union a light and a strength all divine. What should we do if we were left to our own light alone and to our natural strength? But, what shall we not be able to do with the aid of God, which is never refused us when we ask for it with humility and confidence, doing on our part the little in our power!

III. Thirdly, we must give much attention, assiduity, and perseverance to the consideration of the Rule from all points of view, in order to examine it again and again in every sense and to enter into all its details after having viewed it as a whole. The Royal Prophet meditated unceasingly upon the Law of the Lord; he there ever discovered new beauties; he there found light in his doubts, and guidance as to how he should act in every circumstance: behold what we should do after his example.

Looked at from one point of view, the Rule will enlighten us upon spiritual matters which before were unknown to us; from another point, it will give us the solution of a doubt which torments us; regarding it from another side, we will find rules of conduct applicable to our present circumstances. If we examine, under another aspect, a point which has already furnished us with different lights, we shall again find there more strength to aid us in our combats. It is a closed chest with several divisions, each one of which is filled with different treasures; in order to find them all, it is necessary to open this chest, draw out the cases, one after another, and afterwards examine what they contain, piece by piece.

IV. In fine, to succeed more surely in this work, we must, in the fourth place, meditate upon the Rules with order and with method, for, without this, we cannot see in each point all that might be seen—we see very imperfectly the little that we do see—the impressions will be effaced much more easily, and the effects, as to practice, will be almost nothing.

God loves order; He proceeds with method in His works. When He created the world, did He not accomplish this great work with order and method; making on one day one thing, on another day another thing, afterwards examining what He had done in order to sanction it, and to ordain that, until the end of time, each one of His creatures should follow the rules which He had just imposed upon them, and in the order which He had prescribed? It is then to act according to the views of God, and conformably to His manner of proceeding, when we regulate the operations of the soul as we do those of the body.

If we wish to do some manual work, we prepare the necessary materials; we see that they have all the qualities suitable and proper for our object; we gather them together and employ them according to the rules prescribed and in the order necessary; we take models in order to conform ourselves to them; we compare what we have made with these models; we examine in what we have gone astray in order to correct it; and, in fine, we give our approbation to this work only in as much as we see that it is made in all its parts according to the rules which con-

cern it: why should we not do the same in spiritual things which require our co-operation? Why should it be only the operations of the faculties of the soul that are performed without order and at hazard, while God Who does nothing at hazard, has organized our nature in such a manner that we might, in imitation of Him, do all things with order and method? We have been created to His image and likeness; we should then proceed in all things as He Himself proceeds. This, then, is the most suitable order for us to follow in meditating upon the Rule, and the method which appears to us most proper for giving a full knowledge of them and for applying them practically to our actions.

First, it is well to commence by putting ourselves in the Presence of God, and by making the preparatory prayer as we do in other meditations; humbling ourselves before His Divine Majesty; adoring Him with sentiments of respect and annihilation, accompanied by contrition and confusion at the sight of our sins which render us unworthy to appear before the God of all sanctity; afterwards giving up to Him all the faculties of our soul in order that they might act only for His glory; begging, in fine, for the light necessary to understand the perfection of the point of the Rule upon which we meditate and the strength we need to practise this perfection.

The first point of the meditation consists in reading a point of the holy Rule with great attention, weighing every word in order to comprehend the sense, the depth and practical import, and to become penetrated with its spirit. The letter is brief, but it is full of meaning; there is not an empty or useless word, not an expression which has not its place, not one which is found there by chance. The understanding of the sense hidden in the terms gives the key to all the rest, and upon this first work depends that which follows; that is why we should do it with much care.

In the second point, we must examine how the point of the Rule upon which we meditate, facilitates for us the means of acquiring the spirit of our holy Order. It will be easy for us, in regarding the Rule from this point of view, to find in each of its articles means for keeping alive in us the spirit of penance and of mortification, the spirit

of prayer and of union with God, and the spirit of zeal for the glory of God and the good of souls.

The third point consists in seeking out models for the perfect practice of this Rule; because examples, joined to the lights received in the preceding considerations, are very profitable, and give to the soul an increase of good will to devote itself generously to the practice of the perfection of each point of our holy Rule. We find in the life of our Lord practical examples of the perfection of each point of our holy Rule; for there is no kind of perfection that He did not practise. The most holy Virgin will also furnish us with examples which are very touching and very proper to excite us to walk in her footsteps; and then our holy Mother St. Teresa, and so many other Saints, who have left great examples in accordance with the point of the Rule upon which we meditate, will be capable of giving us a salutary incentive.

The fourth point, which is very practical, requires great attention: it consists in contrasting our conduct with the perfection we have seen while meditating upon the sense, the spirit and the models of our holy Rule, and in making a serious, circumstantial and detailed examination of the manner in which we accomplish this Rule, in order to repair what is defective; in taking the means for doing better in the future; in testifying to God our repentance; in asking of Him the aid of His grace in order to practise what its light has shown us; in fine, thanking him for the graces received, and placing under the protection of the most holy Virgin the good resolutions we have taken during this exercise, which will necessarily result in constantly perfecting our conduct, and in rendering it more and more conformable to the spirit of our holy Profession. And as during every eight days it is well to exercise one's self in the perfect practice of the point of the Rule upon which we have meditated, so in the course of the year, we could meditate thoroughly upon all the Rules and practise the perfection of them according to the lights we have received in our meditations. And as the subject is one of such depth that new beauties are always to be found in it, it is necessary to labor all one's life in order to draw from it new practices of perfection.

EXAMEN.

Have we esteemed our holy Rules? Our conduct will answer this question. . . . Let us examine then how we have observed the Regular Discipline and we shall know whether we have esteemed our holy Rule, or not. The Rule directs that we live in obedience, mortification, humility, solitude, silence and prayer: have we always obeyed the first sound of the bell, the voice of our Prioress, or any other person having authority over us? What delays, at one time to finish some work, at another, a few more stitches without urgent necessity; again, to prepare some work, or to give a last glance at what we have in hand; at another time, because of some slight difficulty which we had not the courage to surmount on the spot; again, on account of some discontent or weariness which rendered us dull and indolent? . . . Have we been faithful to our holy observances? What daily and habitual negligences! Here, it is our walk which is contrary to the rules of modesty, our bearing which is not religious; there, it is the wandering of the eyes, lightness, imprudence of the tongue; elsewhere, it is idleness, useless going about, etc.; in the Choir, it is want of exactitude, of punctuality in the ceremonies and the offices which we have to fulfill.

Have we obeyed those who had authority over us? Is it obeying in truth when we reason, discuss and delay when obedience requires something of us? In how many circumstances have we not impaired our obedience by some one of these defects? Have we preserved everywhere the spirit of mortification? Ah! if the different parts of the Monastery were able to speak, what could they not tell about our irregularity in this respect! Everywhere we should hear ourselves accused of having sought to satisfy rather than mortify ourselves. The Choir would reproach us with moments of indolence, seeking after our own ease, curious glances, and the vain thoughts with which we have amused ourselves, etc. . . . The Refectory would tell us daily that we sought to occupy ourselves with what was served to us, to relish its taste, to avoid touching all that was repugnant to us; it would recall to us so many little seekings after what pleased and suited us, so much eagerness or so much slowness, accord-

ing to the instincts of nature; so many calculations to see what would cause us the least possible mortification; so many frivolous thoughts, animal preoccupations, which have turned away our attention from the reading; so many remarks and comparisons capable of keeping up within us the spirit of inquietude, self-love and nature. The Cell would overwhelm us with reproaches about our unmortified position, about a thousand little liberties which only tend to put us at our ease and to ruin the spirit of mortification; so many idle thoughts with which we have amused ourselves and which have made us lose much time; so many reflections upon ourselves, or of vain complacency, ill humor, or other sentiments which show how the "old man" still lives in us. The Dormitories would reproach us for the curiosity with which we have allowed ourselves to look to the right and to the left, at this one or that one, at this object and then at that. In fine, everywhere we should hear some voice accusing us of our tepidity in mortifying and overcoming ourselves.

Have we been attentive to do all our actions according to the spirit of the Rule? Do we always choose that which is most conformable to its spirit? How many times have we inclined towards this or that, only through a natural impulse, at the expense of what the Rule wishes of us? How many times do we forget that we have rules to follow in all that we do, and wherever we are; and, in consequence of this forgetfulness, how many faults against silence, against religious modesty, against poverty, against obedience, against charity, etc.

If we had esteemed our Rules, should we not have been more faithful in observing them? Should we not have given all our attention to becoming living Rules? When we esteem a precious stone, we delight to adorn ourselves with it; when we esteem any object, we love to make use of it; and when we cast anything aside and forget it, it is a proof that we make little account of it. Our conduct then accuses us of falsehood, if we say that we appreciate our Rules when we observe them so badly.

Whence then comes this want of regularity, this want of esteem for the Rules? Do we read them with attention and respect? Do we meditate upon them assiduously, seriously, with order, and accord-

ing to the method which has been given us for this purpose? This book which contains the Will of our God, we open with an indifference which paralyzes the faculties of our soul, we read a few lines without attention, without a desire of understanding the sense and the practical meaning of the words, and so we close it without our soul having taken the nourishment therein contained. Sometimes we try to meditate, but it is with tepidity, without a spirit of faith, without a true desire of drawing from this meditation any practical fruit; we limit ourselves to a superficial consideration of it, or to read and reread the text several times, without developing it, without making any application or any examen of it; and we come from this meditation as indifferent in regard to the observance of the Rule as we were before. How many times also, under the pretext that we did not know how to meditate upon the Rule, have we neglected this exercise, and passed a considerable time without occupying ourselves seriously with it!

If persons who embrace any state whatsoever should study so badly the rules of that state, would they, in the end, ever profess it honorably, or even in a passable manner? How many hours, days, months and years are passed in studying Civil Law, in meditating upon the rules of Art: what would a lawyer, a physician, or a military officer be, without a thorough knowledge of their profession? What then are we, without the knowledge and study of our Rules? How can we practice what we do not know? Should we not blush in seeing that, after so many years passed in Religion, the thing that we know less perfectly, that which we have studied least, is that which should have occupied us continually?

Should we not blush to see men of the world consecrate their days and nights to studies which are of no utility to salvation; and we, who are called to study the science of sanctity, fear to employ therein some few moments, when we sometimes pass a considerable time in occupying ourselves with trifles, with studying the defects of others, the follies of this one, the intentions of that one? Is it for this that God has called us, and commanded us to meditate

day and night upon His Law? Are we true Religious simply because we have the habit and the name, without understanding or practising the Rules, and without having acquired their spirit? Are we doing the Will of God, when we do not even know in what it consists? Have we understood well that we could not reach sanctity except by accomplishing perfectly the Will of God, manifested by the Rules? Ah! if we understand it now, let us set to work without delay; let us beg our Lord to pardon our negligence in meditating upon our Rules, and the numberless faults which have been the consequence of it; and, henceforth, let us be more faithful in reading them attentively and daily, meditating upon them often and seriously, and, finally, by practising them entirely, and without relaxation until death.

SECOND MEDITATION

On the Title of our Holy Rule

Text: *To the Religious of Mount Carmel.*

Let us remark in the first place that Carmel is a Mountain, and that the Religious who dwell thereon are solitaries with God alone. Let us represent to ourselves this Mountain, its rugged aspect, its thorns and briars, its elevation, etc. There one breathes pure air; its summit is a place of repose, above the region where storms and tempests gather; there a mysterious silence reigns: the silence of God.

Let us consider the soul called to live upon this Mountain that it might realize these words of a Prophet, as they were formerly realized in the person of another great Prophet whom we honor as our Father: "The solitary will seat himself and be silent, and there he will raise himself very high above himself." In order to become a solitary upon this Mountain, the Religious leaves the world, his family, friends, etc. . . . Arrived at the foot of the Mount, he rids himself of all that is not absolutely necessary, so that he may ascend more easily the rugged path which will conduct him to its summit. In proportion as he ascends, he despoils himself of his garments, and labors with ardor to remove the obstacles which he meets with in his path. Here, it is a thicket which he must cut through; there, a ravine must be crossed; higher up, it is the point of a rock which he must hew down. (By force of walking, of mounting, of working, and of not sparing himself, he reaches the solitude, where he is permitted to seat himself and there to listen in silence to the Voice of God.) Is not this what we should do in order to separate ourselves, despoil ourselves, detach ourselves from all that is not God and that could prevent from uniting ourselves to Him in interior solitude? We cannot become true solitaries except by an habitual exercise of penance, of mortification and of renunciation, represented by the exercise of him who ascends a mountain, and by which we attain a complete despoliation

and an entire separation from all attachment to creatures and to ourselves: a separation and a detachment from sin and the occasions of sin, by means of corporal penance and the mortification of the heart; a separation and a detachment from all creatures by the mortification of the interior and exterior senses; a separation and a detachment from ourselves by the renouncement of our own interests and all that can feed self-love.

The perfect practice of our holy Rule ought to do this, and thus aid us to acquire the perfection of the spirit of penance, which arises from the knowledge and the love of God, the knowledge and detestation of sin and its malice; a spirit of penance which we may regard as a key that opens the door to contemplation, to which we are called, and as the first step by which we mount into the region of spiritual things.

Have we the spirit of penance and mortification, which ought to make us solitaries? Have we understood that we cannot enjoy the advantages of true solitude while we draw after us a multitude of importunate companions of which we have not the courage to take leave: that attachment to what pleases us, that subjection to the requirements of nature, that susceptibility of self-love which causes a multitude of little unmortified passions to arise at the least humiliation? Have we so much as arrived at the foot of the Mountain by detachment from all that we have left in the world? Alas! how many returns to our families and elsewhere, which retard our reaching solitude!

SECOND POINT

A Spirit of Prayer and of Union with God.

"The solitary will seat himself and be silent."

Let us consider our solitary arrived in solitude, detached from all that is not God, and breathing the healthful atmosphere which reigns upon those heights. What is he going to do? "He will seat himself and be silent;" a repose and silence which we shall now consider: first, as dispositions necessary for acquir-

ing the spirit of prayer; second, as the effect and result of this spirit of prayer and union with God, which is nothing else than the habitual exercise of the faculties of the soul upon God, and the union of our will with His.

I. First, repose and silence are necessary in order to give to the spirit of prayer a free and efficacious exercise, so that the soul may unite itself to God. Let us remark, however, that it is not an idle repose, but a repose of love which ought always to be in action; for the heart ceases to love when it ceases to act. Thus the solitary who wishes to communicate with God and to unite himself to Him, does not trouble himself about anything else; gives entrance into his soul to no trouble, no agitation; the inferior part is controlled by the spirit of penance and of renunciation; all within him is in peace and repose, in such a manner as to allow the faculties of the superior part the facility of listening to God, of acting in Him and for His glory, conformably to His holy Will. He leaves to God the care of all things; he covets nothing, because He finds all things in God; he fears nothing, because He has given himself up to God, and he confides in Him. He buries his past in the mercies of the Lord; he abandons his future to Divine Providence; and he employs the present moment to entertain himself with his All, to love Him, to obey Him, to praise Him, to glorify Him and to unite himself to Him as intimately as possible.

Silence is also necessary to facilitate the spirit of prayer. God speaks in silence: it is then necessary that silence should be kept in order to hear His Voice; it is necessary that the spirit of the world should be silenced; it is necessary to impose silence upon all the voices of little passions which cry out for pleasure, satisfaction, enjoyment, consolation, sweetness, etc. Silence, then, is necessary as a means and a disposition for hearing God, for understanding the secrets of the interior life and the ways of pure love. It then remains for us to labor to establish ourselves in this repose and in this silence, which demands an exercise of vigilance and of love, to ward off all that can agitate the soul, and make a noise within it. We should

renounce all that forms an obstacle to these essential dispositions, in order to listen to God and to unite ourselves to Him; and we shall then experience what I have said above: that there is a repose and a silence which are the effect and the result of the spirit of prayer and of union with God.

II. Yes, it is then that a more perfect repose becomes the portion of a solitary soul; all agitations cease, all its movements center in God, and participate in the sweetness and the suavity of His operations; it is then that the will, entirely united to that of our Lord, participates in the repose and the peace of God, and finds itself above the attacks of the events of the world, and of all that which, humanly speaking, could cause it trouble and agitation.

It is then that the soul, in divine repose and interior solitude, finds itself naturally plunged into a mysterious silence, produced by the contemplation of God, of His perfections and of His works. A silence of adoration and of praise at the sight of the greatness of the Divine Majesty; a silence of confusion and of annihilation at the sight of the abasements and the sufferings which a God has endured for His rebellious and ungrateful creature; a silence of gratitude and of love upon seeing unfolded before it the tableau of the mercies and the goodness of this God of Love; in a word, a silence which realizes these words of the Royal Prophet: "Silence is the praise of God." And, in effect, the more we advance in the knowledge of divine things, the more we feel the need of annihilating ourselves and of being silent; for the human tongue grows mute before such great marvels.

In fine, the solitary soul, united to God by habitual prayer, listens to Him and speaks to Him without the noise of words. Only those who have the sweet experience of this can comprehend how such recollection is effected; and even for them, it is not always easy to express it, and to give an exact idea of it. The Heart of God and the heart of the solitary, being united, mutually communicate their desires and their views in the most perfect silence. One reads in the other and their wills accord: this communication feeds love, cements union, and transforms us in God. It is then

that we read in His Heart His divine wishes, and they are engraven in ours; it is then that we see in Him, the efficacy of the desires that we manifest to Him, and which He Himself first formed in us, and that we draw thence that confidence which cannot be shaken.

O precious silence, mysterious and divine exercise! When shall it be given us to experience it? It will be when we have well purified our hearts by the entire renunciation of all things and of ourselves, in order to seek God alone in repose and interior silence.

Let us then see where we are in this respect, and let us put our hand to the work. Have we understood well what it is to be a solitary, seated and silent? Our conduct will answer this question for us.

Why so much agitation, so much trouble, so much eagerness in our spiritual exercises, and in our efforts to seek after an imaginary repose? Has it not often happened that we have withdrawn from creatures through a melancholy and unsociable humor, imagining that we could find peace and repose in avoiding what contradicted this humor? Have we not thought to have found this repose in what pleased us and in indulging ourselves in certain consolations and spiritual delights, and in an idleness ruinous to the advancement of the soul? Have we not placed our repose in practices of devotion or of penance, in our interior dispositions or in the favors of God, instead of placing it in His immense Mercy? Have we not relied too much upon certain persons, and upon the spiritual helps which we receive from them? How many times have we not found that this repose did not merit even the name, since it is always troubled by some fears or by some painful anticipations? Have we silenced the requirements and the sallies of nature, and the susceptibilities of the "ego" which are a great obstacle to interior silence and union with God? Have we not imagined that we were silent and united to God, when we allowed our soul to remain in a certain inactivity which enervates the faculties and lulls them to sleep, without any profit, without any good result, either to ourselves or for the glory of God?

Let us remember that the spouse slept without ceasing to watch; and this will make us understand that our silence and our repose should not paralyze the faculties of the soul, especially the will. Have we remained in silence and interior repose during tribulations, contradictions, humiliations, and the thousand vicissitudes of life? Alas! how can we preserve this substantial peace, which does not depend on any event or any creature, and how can we remain in interior silence when we watch so little over ourselves, over our passions, our senses, our tongue, our imagination, and over all the movements of nature, which prevent us from being true solitaires, and from remaining in silence as our vocation obliges us to do?

THIRD POINT

A Spirit of Zeal for the Glory of God and the Good of Souls.

"There he will raise himself very high above himself."

It is in the exercises of the solitary life, animated, purified and nourished by the double spirit of Elias, that our soul will raise itself above all things by a veritable transport of pure love, desiring no longer anything but God and His glory, without any returns upon self.

It is this spirit of zeal which devoured this holy Prophet when he said: "I burn with zeal for the Lord God of hosts."

Drawn away from our end by sin, we should return by penance and prayer, and have no other desire than that of glorifying God, accomplishing His Will and making it known and loved as much as is in our power. This is the spirit of our holy vocation, this is the perfection of the Law of God, according to these words of the Divine Master: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, with thy whole soul, with thy whole strength, and thy neighbor as thyself for the love of God." The spirit of zeal inclines us to these two points with ardor, generosity and perseverance, whence it follows that we ought to raise ourselves very high above nature, above our tastes, our repugnances, our health, our repose and all

personal interests, in order to seek in all things the loving accomplishment of the good pleasure of God, in our regard and in regard to all creatures. We must then raise ourselves very high above all these weaknesses, so that these returns upon self might not cause this ardor and zeal to grow cold; for, if our elevation is mediocre, the cries of nature, the ruses of self-love, will very soon cause us to descend and to disregard the good pleasure of God in order to satisfy the exigencies of the "ego."

We must raise ourselves very high in order that our devotedness for souls may be entire; otherwise, we shall always be stopped by some human consideration, some motive of self-interest; egotism will preserve its empire and will destroy the reign of perfect charity in our heart; and we shall lack courage to correct all our defects, and to repress all movements contrary to this spirit of immolation which characterizes a child of Carmel.

Let us examine if we are sufficiently despoiled of all things and united to God alone, in order to be able to raise ourselves above ourselves to the desired height. What is the motive of our actions? Is the glory of God the one object which we have in view? Is that of knowing and accomplishing His Will our sole desire? Do we seek this end with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength? Do we know how to raise ourselves generously above nature when we are in a state of suffering, in order to accomplish a regular exercise, or an act of obedience? Do we not fall back upon ourselves when we meet with some humiliation or contradiction in a work ordained by God?

Is our devotedness for the salvation of souls very generous, and is it shown by works? Do we know how to forget our own interest in order to work, to humble ourselves, and to suffer, with a view of doing good to souls? Is our zeal controlled by obedience, and conformed to the spirit of our vocation? Is it regulated by prudence and the spirit of God, having regard to the time, the place, the circumstances, the dispositions and the qualities of the persons with whom we treat, not following any movement of na-

ture and repressing all indiscreet eagerness? Have we understood how efficacious our zeal may become by uniting ourselves to God in quality of victims, and by devoting ourselves, for this end, to the practice of renunciation, humility, obedience, and all the virtues which immolate and destroy the "ego"?

Have we taken care to keep up our zeal by meditation and prayer, where we receive the light and strength which give vitality to our work, and procure the glory of God and the salvation of our neighbor? Ah! how many returns upon ourselves! What tepidity in our pious exercises! What negligence in the practice of religious virtues Let us humble ourselves and seek to repair the past by conduct more conformable to the spirit of our vocation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

Since we ought to be this happy solitary who seats himself, who keeps silence and who raises himself very high above himself, it is necessary to labor to become it; and, for this purpose, let us gather from this exercise some fruit which will nourish our soul with the spirit by which it ought to live.

1. We must have understood that the spirit of penance, of mortification, and of renunciation, is absolutely necessary in order that we may become true solitaries, and we recognize that fidelity to the practices of the Rule will aid us to acquire this spirit, because everything in it contributes to detach us from all that is not God.

2. We have also understood that this total detachment ought to establish us in repose, in the silence of the spirit of prayer and union with God; a repose and a silence which cannot exist as long as our inferior nature is not subdued, and we preserve the least attachment to our personal interests; and this obliges us to repress all movements of nature which trouble us, make us anxious, and prevent us from thinking of God and of uniting ourselves to Him.

We have appreciated this repose, and this divine silence in which the soul discovers the Will of God,

attaches itself to it with all its heart, and nourishes itself with it in such a manner as to destroy all self-will; and we are resolved to do all in our power to establish ourselves in this repose, in such a manner that no event of any nature whatsoever, nor any creature, can be able to draw us out of it.

Again, we wish to impose silence upon so many importunate voices which prevent us from listening to that of God; we wish to meditate upon the mysteries and truths of our holy Religion, a profound knowledge of which will augment in us the fire of charity, and will aid us to go out of ourselves entirely.

We wish, in fine, to empty our heart of all affection to created things and to ourselves, in order to fill it entirely with God, so as to unite ourselves to Him as intimately as possible.

3. We understand that exercises of penance and of prayer, made in a spirit of love, ought to animate us with an ardent zeal for the glory of God, and lead us to immolate ourselves for the interests of the Divine Majesty and for the salvation of our neighbor. We wish, then, with all our heart, to raise ourselves above ourselves, so that from an exalted view-point, we may see with the eyes of faith, what is for the glory of God and in what the good of souls consists; in order that no human consideration, no returns upon self, might put an obstacle to what it is in our power to do for the attainment of this end. We wish to unite ourselves to our Divine Savior and thus give value to our exercises of zeal, and to our immolation.

Let us thank our Lord for having associated us with Himself in the great work of Redemption, by calling us to a vocation, the spirit of which conducts us to a state of entire immolation for so noble an end. We recognize with joy the grace which God has given us in calling us to Carmel by a vocation which is all love and charity: love in its principle, love in its motives, love in its practice, its exercise and its effects, love in its end.

It is then with a good will that we are going to set out to climb to the summit of this holy Mountain, and avoid all the obstacles which might prevent us from reaching the place of our repose. It is with con-

fidence in God that we are going to give ourselves to the study and to the perfect practice of our holy Rule, which is the way God has traced out for us, the seat upon which we ought to sit down, the voice which ought to speak in our favor, if we are faithful. It is in it we find the spirit which raises us into a supernatural region, and renders us fit to procure the glory of God and the good of souls, by our union with the God of Majesty, of Mercy and of Love.

MEDITATIONS ON THE PRIMITIVE RULE OF ST. ALBERT, PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM

CHAPTER FIRST

Of Having a Prior, and of the Three Vows.

Text: *The first thing we ordain is that one of you be Prior, who shall be elected to this charge by the unanimous consent of all, or of the greater or wiser part; to whom all shall promise Obedience, and having promised it, endeavor to observe it in truth by works, as also, Chastity and Poverty.*

FIRST POINT.

The First Thing We Ordain.

We must here recognize a legitimate authority, which by the order of God, can institute and ordain.

Let us call to mind that St. Brocard and his Religious, who dwelt on Mt. Carmel, applied to St. Albert, then Patriarch of Jerusalem, for a precise Rule which they could observe, according to the mode of life they had embraced, and by which they might distinguish what was of precept from what was only of counsel, for, until then, they had had no Constitutions but the will of their Superiors, and the Rules of St. Basil, which they found to be expressed in terms too general and which exposed them to many inconveniences.

The holy Patriarch understood the justice of their request, and, guided by the spirit of God, from whom he had received his authority, composed that admirable Rule upon which we are now going to meditate.

He begins by making an institution and gives a positive order which we should receive with entire submission. Let us see then what this ordinance is, thus placed in the first line as being of great importance.

Every society requires a head, especially a Religious Society whose members receive direction from their head, and who could not be truly Religious if they did sacrifice their own will in order to have no other than that of their Superior. The necessity of having a Prior is therefore evident.

But, let us carefully note these words: *One of you.* It is necessary not only to have a Prior, but he must be a member of the same body, a Religious of the same Or-

der, and, as far as possible, of the same Community, in order that he may be known by the other members and that he may know those whom he governs, so that love, submission, and confidence may reign among them. He must be able to say, like the Good Shepherd: "I know my sheep, and my sheep know Me."

What confidence is derived from this mutual knowledge, since a Superior of the same Order and of the same House so readily understands all the wants and all the trials of his subjects. But as it can happen that a Superior who has been imposed upon the Community might not possess the confidence of its members, this wise Rule directs that he be *elected to this charge by the consent of all, or of the greater or wiser part*. Thus, the person who governs us does not herself obtain the office and is not imposed by another; she is elected, chosen, nominated by the whole Community, or, at least, by those whom age, virtue and good judgment render more capable of making a suitable choice, and of judging wisely in a matter of such great importance, and upon which depend the good of the whole Community, the advancement of souls, the honor of the Order and the glory of God.

In order to enter into the spirit of the Rule in this particular, let us examine the dispositions necessary, and the conduct proper to be observed by the Vocal Sisters, before, during and after the elections, in order that they might make a wise use, according to the Will of God, of their active voice. We shall consider, later on, the qualities of those who have a passive voice in this matter.

Our habitual disposition in this regard should consist in simplicity, uprightness of heart, purity of intention, detachment from creatures, disengagement from all particular views and personal interests, confidence in God, and an entire abandonment into His Hands, desiring and seeking only His Will, His glory, and the good of the Community, without either anxiety or eagerness.

Before the elections we should pray much, and observe silence concerning our views upon the subject, unless it be with our Superior, to whom we may confide our doubts and troubles, if we have any, in order to obtain light and assistance, as from God Himself; let us mistrust our own judgment and self-love which might easily deceive us. We ought to observe an inviolable secrecy before, during and

after so serious an action. The Ceremonial enjoins this in order to show how important it is for the good of the Order. Unhappy the Community where this secrecy is not kept! Woe to the light and imprudent Religious, who make known their views and seek to impose them upon others. They usurp the right of God and put themselves in the place of the Holy Spirit, in order to make a choice which He alone has the right to inspire. Woe to the curious Religious who question others, so that they may sound their intentions and scrutinize their thoughts, in order to find out what they are going to do, or what they have done. They run the risk of allowing themselves to be influenced in opposition to the Will of God, or to conceive thoughts and sentiments contrary to charity, and they are in danger of fomenting, or taking part in, divisions or intrigues which are so contrary to the Religious spirit. There is every reason to fear the result of an election when silence, recollection and prayer do not keep souls under the gentle influence of grace, but, we may expect everything for the good of the Community, when each Religious treats of this affair with no one but God, her Superiors, and her own conscience.

After the election, made according to the spirit of God, we should see in the result, only His holy Will; and even though this should be contrary to the views we had previously, or to the choice we had made, we should be equally at peace, and contented at the thought that everything, having been directed by God, will contribute to His glory. It is by this infallible mark that we shall recognize whether or not we possess uprightness and purity of intention, for, trouble and inquietude argue a want of submission to the pure Will of God.

In order to make a good choice, and to perform this action as perfectly as possible, we should be well penetrated with its importance as well as with the opinion of the Church and of the holy Fathers concerning it; and we shall see that to give our vote at hazard and without examination, would not be an indifferent thing, if it should result in an election, the effects of which would prove fatal to the good of the Order, as happens when the subject elected has not the qualities requisite for governing well.

The Council of Trent says that the state of the family

of Jesus Christ will always be unsettled and exposed to ruin, if the qualities which ought to be possessed by the members which compose it, are not found in the head. Therefore, to give one's vote for the election of a subject who possesses neither the holiness, the capacity, the knowledge, nor the zeal and devotion required for governing according to the spirit of God, is to be responsible for the decline of a Community. We should then attach great importance to this affair, and neglect nothing that could assist us in making a good choice; for not only does the good of the Community depend upon it, but we ourselves shall not be sheltered from danger nor exempt from a grave fault, if we do not choose the subject who is most worthy and most capable. Now, the principal qualities, all of which should be found in a candidate to whom we could give our vote, are: virtue, holiness, capacity, knowledge and doctrine, as well as zeal and devotion for the interests of God and of His House; and in order to determine our choice, we should know that the one who possesses these qualifications in a higher degree than the other candidates, should be considered the most worthy.

A simple Religious may be greatly elevated in perfection, and yet be wanting in some of the above qualities; but they are indispensable for the one who governs. For by her virtue and the holiness of her life she will embalm the House of God, she will attract to herself, in order the better to lead them to God, the souls confided to her care; she will be a light to direct their steps along the way of the evangelical counsels; she will herself receive from God the light which she is to reflect upon others, she will fulfill all her duties conscientiously, and will be protected from the many dangers to which one weak in virtue would be exposed in such an office, amid the distractions, embarrassing cares, difficulties and labors with which her path is strewn. St. Paul teaches us the importance of this point when he says, that a prelate ought to be irreproachable in his life, chaste, sober and charitable, in order to acquit himself worthily of his obligations; and, St. Gregory says, that he ought to excel in virtue.

Alas! alas! without a solid foundation of humility, charity and abnegation, how can one guide others, receive the necessary light from God, and bear so heavy a burden

without faltering and even falling, dragging many other souls along with her?

Let us not forget that we should also find in the subject to be elected, a certain aptitude for business and for managing household affairs, together with a certain amount of tact, prudence and good judgment, in order to be able to treat with seculars and to govern the Monastery wisely. A certain degree of knowledge concerning dogma, morals and spiritual matters, is also necessary. It is St. Paul who requires this qualification, joined to holiness of life, for the formation of a good prelate. "He must," says he, "be able to exhort and to convince; and let him be sound in doctrine."

Our Lord having chosen St. Peter to make him the Chief of the Apostles, after He had assured Himself that he surpassed the other Apostles in love, said to him: "Feed My sheep", that is to say, give to their souls the instruction and nourishment necessary.

If a religious soul needs instruction regarding some point of perfection, if she has some doubt or trouble, to whom does she turn? To her Prioress. For the guidance and direction of her soul, to whom does she habitually have recourse? To her Prioress. If she wishes to understand the meaning of some point of the Rule or Constitutions, again, it is to her Prioress that she addresses herself; in a word, the Prioress must be able to answer the questions addressed to her in various circumstances; and she should therefore possess not only virtue, but likewise understanding, and a knowledge of the subjects upon which she is questioned.

Finally, besides virtue and doctrine, the subject to be elected ought to possess zeal for the glory of God and the advancement of souls. To give good example and to exhort are two essential points, it is true, but to these must be added works of zeal, such as watching over others, admonishing, correcting and punishing them, and maintaining regularity. "Impunity," says St. Bernard, "is the daughter of the indifference of Superiors; it is the mother of insolence, the root of imprudence, and the nurse of disobedience to all laws." We now have an idea of the essential dispositions which should be found in the subject,

in order that we may judge her worthy and capable of governing according to the designs of God.

An election made according to the Rule, *by the common consent of all* gives solid hopes for a good and happy government, because it is to be presumed that the Holy Spirit has guided all things, since He has first been invoked in silence and recollection; then, too, this unanimous concurrence of the members of the Community in the choice of a Superior cannot fail to be a good sign.

The members who have made the choice must love the head whom they have freely and willingly elected; the head elected by all the members cannot but be devoted to the service of those who have given themselves up to her guidance with so much confidence and abandonment; the obligation of loving and of providing for souls who have willingly confided to her the care of their eternal salvation will become sweet and easy for her. Hence arises mutual love and reciprocal confidence in the intercourse of the members with their head. Let us here acknowledge the goodness of our God in condescending to our weakness by giving us this point of the Rule which thus softens so much of what is painful and trying to nature in the yoke of obedience; it is indeed a law of love which well merits a submission and an obedience full of love.

Our holy Rule says: *The Prior is to be elected to this charge*,—not to this dignity. It is a *charge*, it is a *burden*; a *charge* of the temporal and material goods of the house; a *charge* of the spiritual good and advancement of souls; a *charge* for which the person elected shall have to answer to God. The Prioress is the guardian of the goods of the poor of Jesus Christ: woe to her if she dissipates them! She ought to bear in her heart the souls confided to her, and who have deposited their wills in her hands. She ought to represent to God their necessities, trials and temptations. She is charged with instructing them and guiding them in the paths of perfection, and she will have to render a rigorous account at the Sovereign Tribunal, if through her want of vigilance, care, labor, prayers, or corrections, these souls do not attain to the degree of perfection to which God has called them. What a charge, O my God! and where is the soul presumptuous enough to ambition it?

It is upon the Prioress that all the Religious of the Com-

munity lay the care of their direction; and, God, in investing her with His authority seems, to a certain extent, to transmit to her His right over these souls by confiding to her the mission of manifesting His Will to them. What a responsibility!

O Religious Soul! soften as far as you can, the responsibility which weighs on your Prioress. Console her by your obedience, your fidelity in following her advice, and your submission on every occasion. Lighten her burden by your spirit of faith, and implore for her the assistance of divine grace. Consider her solicitude for your spiritual advancement, lessen the bitterness of it by your zeal in correcting your defects, practising virtue and living in perfect regularity. Assist her in her efforts to maintain peace and charity in the Community, by your humility and gentleness, and by acting with kindness and politeness towards all the Sisters. Spare neither prayers nor good example, in order to co-operate with her in making fruitful the seed which it is her mission to plant in souls; finally, lighten her burden with regard to temporal affairs, by taking care of the things you use and by denying nature the many little demands which it represents to you as necessary; soften for her the pain of commanding by obeying her *in truth*, according to the words and spirit of the Rule: *To whom all shall observe it in truth by works, as also Chastity and Poverty*. The perfection of our Vows is contained in these few words. *To promise Obedience*, here we have the Vow; *endeavor to observe it*, here we have perseverance and fidelity; *in truth*, here we have the perfection of the intentions, the motives, and the practice of obedience; *by works*, here we have the acts which constitutes true obedience. Obedience of mind, of heart, of action, in all things, always, everywhere, under the Eye of God,—this is obedience *in truth*. Let us act for God and we shall act according to truth.

For this purpose, let us go out of ourselves, after having left all else. Let us be chaste *in truth* in body, in mind, and in heart; let us be poor *in truth*, by immolating all to God, our possessions, our bodies, our wills. Let our works correspond to this immolation and thus consummate the sacrifice; let us do this with a good heart, solely for the glory of God, and we shall practise the per-

fection of this point of our Rule, in which is found the basis and the foundation of the whole Religious edifice.

SECOND POINT.

The spirit of our vocation is found enclosed within this point of the Rule, so that the more perfectly we exercise ourselves in it the more shall our souls be nourished by this spirit. Let us then examine it in practice.

Religious dependence, the giving up of our will and all personal interests into the hands of a Superior, no matter what her personal qualities may be, must necessarily furnish many occasions of mortification and renunciation, and thus strengthen the spirit of penance.

The privations imposed by the perfect observance—*in truth*—of the three Vows, furnish further means for sustaining and perfecting this spirit of penance. In fact, to be poor through compulsion, means only that we are in a state of suffering and exterior destitution, but not in a state of Religious Poverty. To obey only through constraint is to be in a state of slavery: it is not obeying *in truth*, with love and with an interior spirit. It is the same with Chastity, for without the spirit of mortification and detachment required by this sublime virtue, it merits not the name. If, on the contrary, we practise our Vows *in truth*, it follows that the spirit of penance and mortification becomes strong and permanent in us, on account of the habitual privations of all kinds to which they oblige us, our whole being becoming a victim in a continual state of immolation.

This point of the Rule also facilitates for us the means of acquiring the spirit of prayer and of union with God; first, by delivering us from the thousand impediments and cares which would necessarily distract us, if we had not a Prioress charged with all exterior relations, as well as with all the details of the material and temporal affairs of the house; and then, by separating and detaching us from that which usually causes distractions and preoccupations of the mind and heart. Thus the spirit of prayer will become more firmly established in our soul in proportion to the generosity with which we sacrifice all affection to created goods, to pleasures, and to our own will. Then our mind, having become free, will readily occupy itself with God, and our heart will unite itself with Him in propor-

tion as it becomes disengaged from creatures and from ourselves.

Lastly, if we are faithful in practising this point of the Rule, our soul, firmly established in the spirit of penance, enlightened and fortified by prayer, will attain that degree of union with God whence arises that true spirit of zeal which devoured our Father St. Elias and, after him, our holy Mother Teresa: zeal for the glory of God, zeal for the salvation of souls, and an entire devotedness to procure the one and the other, by a spirit of charity, all the more ardent as our soul shall be the more detached from all else and more perfectly united to our Supreme and only Good.

THIRD POINT.

Examples.

Our Lord having come upon earth for the salvation of all men, was not content with showing us the way, but He wished first to walk therein Himself in order to encourage us by His example. He has left us no instruction, He has preached no virtue to us, which He did not practise Himself. Now, the Rules of Religious Orders being drawn from the Holy Gospel, it follows that every point of these Rules is marked by a divine seal. We shall easily be convinced of this in the course of these Meditations.

Applying this principle to the first Chapter of our Rule, we find in Our Lord a model of obedience towards those whom His Heavenly Father had given Him as Superiors, although He was Himself superior to all other creatures. During the thirty years of His hidden life, the Holy Gospel tell us that He was subject to His divine Mother and to St. Joseph. His whole mortal life was but one succession of acts of obedience and of submission to those who had any authority—independently of their conduct or personal qualities. “They are seated in the Chair of Moses, do what they tell you, but do not what they do.” Such was the doctrine which He preached by word and example, He Who was the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Master of masters. Let us never forget that Jesus was obedient even unto death; and, whenever obedience seems painful to us, let us cast a look on our Divine Model and we shall be strengthened.

In the practice of the other two Vows, our Divine Mas-

ter has again left us touching examples and powerful motives for encouragement. He was born poor, He lived in poverty, and died despoiled of everything. "The birds of the air have their nests, the foxes their holes, but the Son of Man has not whereon to lay His head." Then, what purity there was in His manners, what reserve and prudence, what modesty and mortification!

Our Divine Lord has also given us an example of how we should dispose ourselves for elections, when He passed the whole night in prayer before choosing His Apostles; and afterwards when, wishing to place one of them at the head, He regarded neither His relative, nor the one whom He permitted to lean on His breast and to whom He confided His intimate secrets, but the one in whom He recognized the qualities proper for governing well.

After these examples given us by the Son of God, we may consider the divine Mary as a model of prayer, of obedience, of poverty and of purity; submissive to those who governed, submissive to the Law, submissive to St. Joseph in a spirit of faith, and obeying in truth and by her works. We see her going to Bethlehem without the least hesitation, notwithstanding the rigor of the season and the state in which she then was. When required to set out for Egypt in the middle of the night, with a young infant, without any preparation, without any means of support, she shows the same obedience, the same submission to him who holds the place of God. Let us consider her poverty, in the interior of her house, in her furniture, utensils and clothing, etc. She works as the poor work. Her own hands wove the tunic that clothed her Divine Son. She gave the offering of the poor, when in obedience to the Law, which did not bind her, she presented our Lord in the Temple. If we consider in the Mother of God, her modesty, her recollection, her reserve in speaking, the holiness of her affections, the simplicity of intention with which she always acted, what a sanctuary of purity do we not find in the heart of this august Virgin!

Our Mother St. Teresa, who had received a special gift for governing well, and who could, so to speak, instruct prelates and doctors, knew also in practice how to obey and to submit, *in truth*, seeing the authority of God in the person who commanded. Thus, when not Prioress herself, she obeyed perfectly the one invested with that

office; and although superior to her in every respect, she subjected herself to her in a spirit of faith as to God Himself. She observed the same conduct in regard to her Confessors and Superiors, doing nothing without their consent, although the Divine Will had been manifested to her; and when their opinion was contrary to a revelation which she had received, she sacrificed the revelation to obedience. Her love of poverty and of the angelic virtue, was proved by her flight from the world and by the great works she undertook in order to give up the Mitigation and to establish the Reform where the perfection of these two virtues, being sheltered from many dangers, shone with greater brilliancy.

Our holy Father St. John of the Cross also teaches us by his writings and example that all supernatural ways must yield to obedience. He allowed himself to be guided by legitimate authority; and the hardest and most humiliating treatment to which he was subjected, always found him submissive, because he had promised obedience, and he kept it *in truth and by works*, in the sight of God and through love. Let us form ourselves upon these models, and we shall live.

FOURTH POINT.

Examen.

Let us now examine where we are in regard to the practice of this point of the Rule, and, in the light of God, let us compare our conduct and our dispositions with the perfection we have just considered in the preceding points of this Meditation.

When we have been obliged to proceed to an election, have we recollected ourselves in silence and prayer before God, in order to obtain from God the grace to make a choice according to His Heart, for His greater glory and for the common good? Have we put aside our natural inclinations, our own interests and private views? Have we kept a rigorous silence concerning our intentions? Have we carefully avoided all intercourse with others, for fear of influencing them or allowing ourselves to be influenced? If any one has had the weakness to confide in us, have we avoided any return of confidence? Have we kept with inviolable secrecy the confidence received? Have we, in our doubts and difficulties, consulted only those who hold the place of God in our regard? Have

we diverted our thoughts from curious researches into the sentiments of others? Have we not interpreted their manner, their countenance? Ah! what sad temptations, what miseries, how many faults and errors arise from such interpretations!

When the results of the election have been conformable to our desires, have we not acted and spoken in such a way as to show that we had triumphed over those of our Sisters whom we supposed had views contrary to our own? Have we refused ourselves every look, every thought, all examination, by which we might discover the secret votes of others? If the choice has fallen on one whom we have thought unfitted for the office, have we not experienced discontent, sadness or ill-humor? Have we recognized the Will of God in an election approved and confirmed by lawful authority? Have we, thenceforward, seen only God in the person of the Prioress elected, without any returns upon ourselves, or upon the one whom we think should have been preferred!

Have we been so foolish as to believe ourselves capable of fulfilling this Office; desiring it as something honorable, or even seeking it as if it were for God's glory? Have we been blind enough to ambition it under pretext of doing good to souls, thus obeying a sentiment of false zeal? If this charge has been imposed upon us, have we refused it through a false humility, to avoid the cross, or through pussillanimity?

We shall not undertake to examine here the conduct proper to be observed by the one elected, nor the sentiments which should animate her. Let us leave it to her to reflect in the Presence of God upon the extent of her obligations and the manner in which she should acquit herself of them. Let her not forget the signification of this word *charge*; let her apply herself to understand the duties it imposes, both in the spiritual and in the temporal order, in relation to God as well as to the souls confided to her care. Let her think of the responsibility such a charge imposes, and let her, without ceasing, seek from God the light and strength of which she is in need to know the Divine Will, to execute it, and to indicate it to others.

As to ourselves, let us examine our own conduct in

regard to our Prioress, and let us see if we have kept *in truth* the obedience which we have promised to her.

→ Have we obeyed in a spirit of faith, blindly, without delay and without reserve? Have all our works, even the least of them, been marked with the seal of obedience? Alas! how many of our actions have had no other motive than that of our own satisfaction and self-love, without the sanction of any legitimate authority? Have we well understood that, by our submission as well as by our regularity, we can lighten the burden of responsibility which weighs upon the person elected? Should we not rather reproach ourselves for having increased that weight by our want of docility, our irreligious conduct, our exactions, and our irregularities? Have we not obliged her to use much consideration in our regard, on account of our peculiarities, our susceptibilities, our want of the spirit of sacrifice? Have we left her entirely free in her direction of us, both as to soul and body? Have we had for her all the regard and respect that is due her? Have we repulsed, from the very beginning, every temptation, every sentiment contrary to the spirit of faith? Have we obeyed our Prioress in mind and heart, as well as in action? How many times has it not happened that, while obeying externally, we have not practised the virtue of obedience on account of the opposition of our will, which caused us to reason and murmur interiorly? Have we not obeyed through natural affection, or to obtain her favor? All this is not obeying *in truth*. Have we not stopped to consider her natural qualities or defects, and regulated our obedience according to the impression thus received? Have we closed our eyes to her personal conduct, her government, her distribution of offices, employments, etc.? Have we closed our ears to the complaints and murmurs of discontented souls; and if we had **any** authority over them, have we led them back to a spirit of faith, obedience and respect? Have we been faithful to pray often in order to obtain the light of the Holy Spirit for her who holds the place of God in our regard, and from whom we must receive direction for our sanctification?

Have we practised poverty *in truth*, detaching ourselves interiorly, not only from what is superfluous, but even from what is necessary, and from everything of which

we have the use, by cheerfully supporting the privation of it? Have we joyfully accepted old and worn things for our use, and such as were most repugnant to nature and self-love? Have we well understood that to bear these privations with exterior silence and through human respect and self-love, while murmuring interiorly, is not being poor *in truth*, and more than when we claim with eagerness what is wanting to us, or show attachment to what we have?

When an occasion presents itself, do we give up willingly to others some object that we find convenient, and abandon it entirely, without troubling ourselves about the use that is to be made, or the care that will be taken of it? Are we industrious in finding means of doing without a number of little things which appear to us as necessary? Are we careful to keep everything clean and in good order, so that nothing may be lost or wasted? Do we love work through a spirit of poverty? Finally, are we of the number of the truly poor in spirit, who keep themselves continually in a state of abjection, self-contempt and annihilation, not only in thought, word and action, but in reality and in the depths of their hearts, wishing to be recognized as vile and contemptible by others, because they see and know themselves to be really so?

Is our heart pure, and detached *in truth* from all creatures? Does it belong entirely to the Heavenly Spouse Who has chosen us? Are we careful to watch continually over our heart, lest anything defiled should enter it? Are we faithful in the practice of mortification of the senses, of the mind, and of the heart, in order to purify our whole being and render it agreeable to God? Do all our thoughts, words and actions tend towards Jesus? Alas! how many glances towards creatures and towards ourselves! how many thoughts of self-love! how many actions sullied by vain glory! How many words in which we seek only our own satisfaction and to attract the esteem and affection of creatures! How inclined we are to seek after created things, forgetting what we owe to the Spouse of our soul! How we seek our own ease and the many little sensualities that displease Him! How many infidelities caused by our lightness, dissipation and self-love!

Have we perfectly understood the whole extent of the

engagement we contracted by pronouncing our Vows? Have we formed a just idea of the total and real despoilment of goods, of pleasures and of our own will, which the observance of our Vows ought to operate in us? Have we really understood that it is the perfect practice of our Vows which makes us Carmelite Religious, and not simply the emission of them? Can we say we have given up our body to Jesus and to our Order, when we are still so much occupied with its requirements, and so solicitous about its care and its comfort? Have we given our will to God in the person of our Superior, when we examine their orders and interpret their intentions according to our own views and personal interests?

O my God! of how many faults have we not rendered ourselves guilty! How little have we understood and how badly practised what our Rule requires of us in this respect! We feel shame, confusion and regret for the past, but we shall show good will, generosity and confidence in Thee, O my God! for the future. . . .

CHAPTER SECOND.

Of Founding Convents.

Text: *You may have places in deserts, or elsewhere, as they shall be given you, suitable and adapted for the observance of your Rule, as to the Prior and the other Religious shall appear convenient.*

FIRST POINT.

You may have places, etc.

We do not see here any obligation for the Religious of Carmel to have a house. The Rule does not say *you shall have* or *we ordain that you have*; it says only, *you may have*, that is to say, you are permitted to dwell in a house instead of a solitary cavern where you usually made your abode. Because in the beginning the Carmelites dwelt in grottoes situated at a little distance from one another, where they occupied themselves in prayer and manual labor.

This permission to dwell in Monasteries has been given in order to unite more easily in Community, souls called to Carmel, and to allow them to enjoy the advantages of the cenobitical or community life without, however, depriving them of those of the eremitical or solitary life, as we shall presently show.

This being so, it is easy to understand by the expressions used in the Rule and from the customs of our ancient Fathers, how poor should be the houses which we are permitted to have, and how small and deprived of all curiosities, comforts and conveniences the cells should be, since our lodgings are destined to replace, and to recall to our minds, the grottoes of the first days of our Order.

Are we then permitted to allow our thoughts to dwell upon the advantages of our habitation, to examine if it is spacious, well-situated? Should we complain of the inconveniences which nature finds there, murmur interiorly, and perhaps even exteriorly? Should we reflect and calculate in order to find means of being lodged more commodiously, of being better sheltered from the rigor of the seasons?

When this temptation comes, let us cast a glance upon the dwellings of our ancestors in Religion; let

us consider attentively the caverns where these holy solitaries retired to take a little repose: only a rock to shelter them from the inclemency of the weather! Do we see there well closed windows, double doors, and those thousand little inventions of delicacy?

We are permitted to have houses, it is true; this is even a necessity for us on account of the weakness of our sex, and the dangers to which we should be exposed if we did not have a strict enclosure to protect us; but does this authorize us to seek after our ease and convenience? If our miserable bodies cannot dwell in the hollow of rocks, our souls, at least, should preserve the spirit of their ancestors, and show themselves worthy descendants of such Fathers.

If our Superiors are always filled with so much charity for the children whom God has given them, and seek to soften the rigor of the seasons and to diminish the sufferings caused by the poverty of our lodgings, have we, for this reason, a right to complain when nature does not find all that it believes it has need of, or when others forget to procure for us the reliefs which we seek with eagerness and inquietude? Should we not, on the contrary, rejoice at all which may recall to us the state in which our ancient Fathers sanctified themselves, and which our Holy Mother St. Teresa herself desired to maintain as nearly as possible, as we see in her writings, and in our holy Constitutions, where we find a paragraph thus expressed: "The buildings, with the exception of the Church, should have nothing ornamental in their construction, the wood-work should be very strong, the Convent small and the apartments low, so that what is necessary and not what is superfluous may be attended to. The walls must be as solid as possible, those of the enclosure high, within which there shall be ground enough to build some hermitages, so that the Religious, after the example of the holy Fathers, may retire to them for prayer;" and in another Chapter of the same Constitutions, it is strongly recommended that we should not use carpets or cushions, because this is a point peculiar to our Order, and as such ought carefully to be observed.

Our holy Mother shows elsewhere in her writings,

in strong and energetic terms, what importance she attaches to having our houses poor, and she feared not to say that it would be a less misfortune for us to be crushed under the ruins of a large and beautiful house, than to live in one contrary to the spirit of the Rule. Whence we should conclude; first, that when we build a Monastery, poverty should preside over its construction; second, when founders or benefactors have them built for us, we should require that the poverty of the Rule be observed, or should refuse their kind offer rather than, by accepting it, to fail in so essential a point; third, that each one of us in particular should love the poverty of our dwelling, and avoid all superfluities and all seeking after our own ease and convenience.

But our holy Rule not only requires that our houses should be poor, but also that they be situated in solitary places, and why? Because the spirit of the world is contagious, and the bustle of cities is contrary to the silence and peace of the Cloister, and because it is very difficult for a Community to preserve the spirit of penance and of prayer, if its relations with persons of the world are easy and frequent.

"Fly," says St. Bonaventure, "men and the commerce of the world, because you have not virtue enough to give yourself up to God and to men at the same time, to occupy yourself with things eternal and with things passing, to be a Religious and to be a worldling." Our vocation, calling us to a life more divine than human, and our feeble nature drawing us in a contrary direction, it follows that we should flee from what favors this last inclination; and this is the reason why we should dwell in solitary places, far from the visits, the news, and the bustle of the world, under pain of losing the spirit of our vocation.

Since we cannot now establish ourselves in deserts, as formerly, at least let us seek, in the cities where we establish ourselves, the less noisy and less frequented neighborhoods, where we can enjoy more solitude. Let us erect enclosure walls which will separate us as much as possible* from the exterior world; let us fly the parlor; let us avoid all useless

intercourse with persons of the world; let us withdraw, as much as possible, from all commerce with creatures; and let us maintain ourselves in solitude as if we were in a desert; let us become a solitary in heart since we cannot be one in the hollow of a rock; let us remain in this solitude, separated in mind and heart from the world, from parents, friends and acquaintances, and particularly, from that little world within ourselves: that is to say, our passions, our self-love, our ease and inclinations; in a word, from ourselves and all our little personal interests. Let us shut our eyes to all those things which we could not see in the desert; close our ears to all noise which we could not hear there; refuse to our senses, our mind and our heart, all the enjoyments and all the pleasures which the poverty and solitude of the desert would not permit us to procure them. Let us mistrust ourselves in regard to the spirit of the world in proportion as we are nearer to it, and occasions of distraction are the more frequent; as our weakness is great, and it is easy to delude ourselves in believing it possible to reconcile a certain amount of intercourse with seculars, with the spirit of our holy vocation.

How can we unite the spirit of penance and prayer with the distractions and bustle of the world which we have left precisely in order to shelter ourselves from its dangers? In the opinion of St. Bernard, and according to our own experience, the thing is impossible.

Besides the poverty and solitude of our houses, our holy Rule requires that we possess also, facilities for following of our holy observances; *You may have places in deserts or elsewhere, as they shall be given you, suitable and adapted to the observance of your Rule.* Regularity is subjecting and painful to nature—this is generally the first obstacle to be surmounted. If to this is added the difficulty of doing good, and the house is not arranged in such a manner that we can easily practice our holy customs, our weakness will lead us to neglect them; very soon re-

laxation will follow and the Community will fall into ruin.

Thus, although we should avoid seeking our ease, in what regards ourselves personally, it is necessary that those who are charged with the care of procuring us a dwelling, should look after that convenience which will assure the regular observance of the Rule: thus, the dormitories should be so arranged that the silence there be not troubled, either during the day or the night; the offices, where noise is likely to be made, should be situated in retired places; the Choir be so situated that the Religious may reach it easily from all parts of the Monastery; the infirmary be so well arranged that the sick may be cared for there without prejudice to the recollection of those who are in solitude; in a word, the arrangement of all the places should contribute to the observance of silence and regularity. And who can better understand and judge of this than those who practice the Rule, and particularly those who, while practicing it themselves, have charge of making it observed by others? This is why we find here these words which terminate the Chapter upon which we are meditating: *As to the Prior and the other Religious shall appear convenient.* It is then to the Fathers and Nuns of the Order that the choice belongs of selecting places suitable and convenient for the observance of the Rule; if, having left this care to seculars, relaxation in regular observance results, we shall have to render a strict account to God.

In order to avoid such a danger, when we are called upon to make a choice, let us have a thorough knowledge of all the regulations concerning it, and show ourselves inflexible against any concessions which might create some obstacle to regular observance in the future.

SECOND POINT

If we are exact in separating ourselves from exterior noise and bustle, in order to preserve the spirit of solitude, if we are content with lodgings, poor and inconvenient to nature, if we seek always that which favors the practice of religious observances, instead

of that which flatters nature, we shall assuredly find, in the observance of this point of our Rule, great facility in acquiring the spirit of our vocation.

In effect, what is more proper to maintain within us the spirit of mortification, than the inconvenience of a poor lodging in a solitary place, where the senses find no satisfaction, and the mind no enjoyment? It is difficult to preserve a spirit of penance and renunciation when we are surrounded with occasions of satisfying nature and self-love! Our heart is so weak, that it readily seeks its ease. Privation is then very advantageous, not only as an aid in acquiring the spirit of penance and mortification, but also to increase in us the spirit of prayer and union with God, for, besides the fact that penance is the sister, the companion and the support of prayer, we learn by daily experience that the conveniences of life, the pleasures of the senses and the enjoyments of the mind, are the principle obstacles to prayer and union with God. In effect, they cause distractions, obscure the mind, dry up and embarrass the heart, in such a way that the faculties of the soul can no longer exercise themselves about God and for His glory. In order to possess the spirit of prayer, without which we cannot unite ourselves to God, we must live in habitual recollection, and this cannot exist without interior and exterior silence, which is acquired by the entrenchment of all that flatters nature, the senses and self-love; from which it follows, that the perfect practice of this point of our Rule conducts us, by the state of privation and renunciation in which it places us, to the perfection of the spirit of our vocation.

It is also in this way, that, raising ourselves above ourselves by the spirit of penance and prayer, we shall, in the third place acquire the spirit of zeal for the glory of God and the good of souls. What is it which prevents us from seeking only and in all things the glory of God? What is it which prevents us from sacrificing ourselves, in union with our Lord Jesus Christ, for the salvation of souls? It is the seeking after our own ease and satisfaction; it is our egotism, that "myself" which glides into all our thoughts,

words and actions. Let us retrench all this by a life of privation, mortification, solitude, recollection and prayer, and our soul, united to God, will raise itself, as the Prophet says, above itself; all our personal interests will naturally disappear; and one only desire will remain, one only attraction, one only end, one sole affection, that is, God and His glory!

Let us bless our Lord a thousand times for having called us, and subjected us to the observance of a Rule, each point of which gives us the means of arriving at the highest perfection; let us appreciate this great grace and make it fructify; and, in order to do this, let us consider the excellence of our holy Rule, let us nourish ourselves with its spirit, and draw forth its essence in prayer. Oh, what marvels are not hidden there! Let us then seek them by the light of the Holy Spirit and with a heart full of good will; let us try to understand and embrace the designs of God as we find them expressed in the Rule, in order to conform our conduct to His divine Mind.

THIRD POINT

Examples

Our weakness, terrified, perhaps, at the perfection to which we are called, has need to be sustained and fortified by examples; and since our good Master is the model by excellence, let us consider how He has practiced the perfection of that point of the Rule upon which we are now meditating.

Let us take the Holy Gospel, let us read the touching history of the birth of the Son of God in the stable of Bethlehem; let us examine the poverty of this first dwelling of the Saviour of the world; let us enter the little home at Nazareth, where He passed the greater part of His life; let us follow Him into the desert, and consider Him without any shelter, with no comforts, in the most profound solitude; let us listen to what He says of Himself, that He had not whereon to lay His head.

The most holy Virgin has given us the same example as her Divine Son, having dwelt with Him in the same places. St. John the Baptist passed his life in the desert, without a house, without companionship.

Our holy Mother St. Teresa procured a very poor house in which to begin her Reform, and she has made known to us her thoughts and desires upon the observance of this point of the Rule, as we have seen above. We may well transcribe here, another passage from her writings which is specially adapted to the present subject.

In relating how the foundation of the first Convent of the Discalced Carmelite Fathers was made, and how happy Father Anthony of Jesus and our holy Father St. John of the Crosss esteemed themselves to be in their poor habitation, she says: "Lord, my God, how little capable of giving interior consolation are fine buildings and exterior pleasures! I conjure you, my Sisters, and you, my Fathers, for the love you bear the Divine Majesty, to remain always greatly detached from magnificent and sumptuous houses, and to have unceasingly before your eyes those holy founders of our Order who are our Fathers, whom we know have reached, through poverty and humility, the enjoyment of the Presence of God.

"I have experienced that, when the body has fewer conveniences, the soul feels greater joy. What advantage can we draw from these fine buildings, needing as we do, only a cell? And what does it matter to us that it be beautiful and spacious, since we are not to occupy ourselves in looking at its walls? Since, as we know that these beginnings (the Reform) aim only to re-establish the purity of the Rule of the most holy Virgin, our Patroness, let us testify our respect for her, and to those holy Fathers, our founders, by conforming ourselves to the life which they led upon earth; and if our weakness renders us incapable of following in all things in their steps, let us at least do that which will not so much affect our health as to take away our life. There is question only of a little work, and very agreeable work it was to these great Saints: the resolution is no sooner taken, than the difficulty, which we at first found, vanishes, and the pain is felt only in the beginning."

Describing later on, the poverty of the place where the two first Friars of the Reform dwelt, she adds: "I shall remember all my life a little cross of wood over the holy water fount, upon which was pasted a paper image of our Lord Jesus Christ, which gave more devotion than if it had been most curiously

carved. The garret, which was in the middle of the dwelling, served as a Choir, where they said the Office, but it was necessary to stoop very low to enter it, as also to hear Mass. There were two small hermitages on either side of the Chapel, where they could remain only seated or lying down; and it was so cold that they had to put a quantity of hay there; the roof was so low that the head almost touched the ceiling; and two little windows opened over the Altar. These good Fathers had only stones for pillows above which there were crosses and skulls. From Matins until Prime they remained in prayer, God giving them the grace to occupy themselves thus; and when they went to say Prime, their habits were often covered with snow, without their perceiving it."

Such is the recital of our holy Mother, upon which we should often meditate in order to excite ourselves, by such examples, to the practise of this point of the Rule which these first Discalced Carmelites observed with so much fervor and perfection. Let us also pray to them in order that, from the height of Heaven where they enjoy the recompense promised to the truly poor, they may obtain for us the grace to walk in their footsteps.

FOURTH POINT

Examen

Is our past conduct conformable to such examples, and does it permit us to call ourselves true children of such Fathers and of such a Mother? Let us interrogate our conscience upon our love of poverty and on our detachment from all the comforts of life. Should we not reproach ourselves for a multitude of little faults in seeking our own ease, a thousand ingenious inventions to preserve ourselves from the cold, the heat and other inconveniences which, without being injurious to health, could have furnished us with the occasion of offering some little sacrifices to the good God? Are we true children of Carmel, when we seek after comforts in that place where we are supposed to be dying to ourselves, when a change of cell saddens us because of the inconveniences which

our immortification makes us discover in the new one while the one we have just left was more to our taste?

Are we happy when find in our dwelling some resemblance with those of our ancient Fathers; when we have to suffer there, some of the privations which they endured for God with so much love and generosity? Are we glad to want some one of those things which we are allowed to use and which we believe to be necessary, although in reality, if we were of a good will, it would be possible for us to do without?

When we feel the effects of poverty, when the doors and windows, not closed hermetically, permit some currents of air to strike us, do we not seek, without evident necessity, to remedy this? If we thought then of our Lord, lying upon straw in a manger; of our holy Father St. John of the Cross, covered with snow and exposed to the cold winds; of so many solitaries lodged in caverns, should we not blush at our unmortified conduct, so little in conformity to that which we ought to observe, if we wish to share in the merits and graces of true poverty?

Have we a right to complain of a want of consolation and of light in prayer, when we are not willing to refuse anything to the demands of our nature? Let us be generous, and God will be liberal towards us; and even when He uses rigor in our regard, should we not accept it, understanding that penance most becomes the sinner?

Have we the spirit of solitude? Do we conduct ourselves in the Monastery as if we were in a desert, seeing no one except through necessity and by obedience, when charity and the glory of God require it; not seeking to hear news; forgetting that which we have heard; keeping silence upon all those things which necessity has obliged us to learn? Alas! how many times, perhaps, have we not broken our enclosure by looking at and listening to what was happening without, under our windows, through the gratings, at the opening of the enclosure door and gates! How many times have we not had the weakness to relate, during the hours of recreation, what we have learnt through these means? How many times, by

means of the imagination, have we not gone through the city and the country, seeking after some pleasure? Have we not introduced ourselves in spirit into drawing-rooms, worldly assemblies, reunions of family or of friends, to take part in their conversations and their pleasures; thus forgetting that we are no longer of the world, that we should forget the habitations of men, since our conversation ought to be in Heaven, and that it is for this reason we dwell in solitary places?

Do we not go to the parlor with pleasure and eagerness, and speak there in a light, dissipated and curious manner? If we do not have to frequent the parlor, does it not happen that we make one of our cell, where we recall our relatives, friends, and persons of the world, in order to entertain ourselves with them about trifles, to the prejudice of the solitude in which we ought to live?

Oh! how clearly we show that we do not possess God in our heart, that we do not hear His Voice, that we little understand the advantages of a solitary life, that we are devoid of the spirit of our holy state, when we thus seek distractions and the society of creatures! We are Carmelites only in habit and name.

Do we show ourselves Carmelites, that is to say, united to God and, for His love, vowed to penance, to mortification, to renunciation, to silence, to recollection, to prayer, in solitude and entire separation from the world, when we seize so promptly the little occasions which present themselves of satisfying our self-love and curiosity: looking eagerly at new things which are brought from outside; asking questions about the style and customs of the world; examining the clothing and the behavior of secular persons who, through necessity, enter the enclosure of the Monastery? What must a postulant, who perceives such miseries, think of the Religious spirit? What should we ourselves have thought of the spirit of Carmel and of its Religious if, upon our entrance, we should have been questioned as we now question newly-entered postulants? What deception if, in leaving the world and desiring no longer to hear it spoken of, we find it again in the Cloister!

Our holy Rule requires that the solitary place which we choose for our dwelling, should be well adapted for

the observance of the customs of our Order. Is it not very often our own personal advantage which we seek, rather than that of the Order? In our offices and in our cells, do we arrange all things with regard to regularity, even when this is to the detriment of our natural satisfactions? Do we prefer, for example, when we have the liberty of choosing, to remain during the hours of silence in a place more solitary, though less agreeable to nature than another would be, where, finding ourselves more at our ease, we should, at the same time, be more exposed to violate this holy silence? Do we prefer to deprive ourselves of a little light, or a little air, rather than expose ourselves to be seen, or to see, by opening the windows at a time when we have reason to fear that we are infringing upon regularity on this point? Have we not imprudently preferred to remain in a place near workmen, or near the offices which necessitate a little noise and bustle, and thus exposed ourselves to many distractions which we could have avoided?

In those employments which place us in relation with the outside world, have we religiously observed all the rules prescribed for the turns, the opening of the enclosure doors and gates, the entrance of workmen, and of other persons whom we are obliged to admit into the Cloister? Have we watched carefully that no other persons than those who are necessary, profited by the opening of the gate or door to enter into the Monastery? Have we faithfully observed what our holy Constitutions prescribe upon the manner of accompanying the Confessor, the workmen, etc., passing through the shortest way, not stopping anywhere without necessity, not speaking unless it is our duty, and in this case, doing so in a religious manner?

Going into the garden while the gardener is there, or when called to be companion, have we always remained near the Sister whom we accompany, and not spoken to the workmen when our companion was at too great a distance to be able to hear us? Upon hearing the bell which announces the presence of seculars in the house, have we taken precautions not to be seen, or upon being surprised in meeting them, have we withdrawn from their sight, without, however, doing anything contrary to gravity and religious modesty?

Let us examine our conduct seriously in regard to the poverty of our dwelling, the spirit of solitude and regularity; and after the sad disclosures that we shall make of so many faults of which we have rendered ourselves guilty, let us humble ourselves, let us thank God for the light received, and let us take generous resolutions in order to merit in the future those graces reserved to the soul which, for the love of God, is poor, solitary, and faithful to regular observance.

CHAPTER THIRD

Of the Cells.

Text: Moreover, in the place wherein you propose to dwell, each one shall have his cell apart, as shall be assigned to him by order of the Prior, and with the consent of the other Religious.

FIRST POINT.

It is not sufficient that a child of Carmel should dwell in a Monastery situated in a solitary place; it is also necessary that in this habitation she should have a separate dwelling, in order that her solitude being more profound, she may possess more facility for attaining her end, which is union with God. This evidently shows us that our life is above all eremitical.

Moreover, in the place wherein you propose to dwell, each one shall have his cell apart. It is thus that our holy Mother St. Teresa understood this Chapter of our holy Rule, since she expressed the intention in instituting the Reform, to make hermits of us, for she had understood that solitude favors contemplation and union with God. However, as the exclusively solitary life offers its dangers, particularly for weak souls not yet strong in virtue, this wise and enlightened Mistress has wished to join to the eremitical life, the cenobitical or common life, in such a manner that, by an admirable mingling of the two, we find united in our holy Order the advantages of the solitary with those of the common life, while we are sheltered from the dangers of both.

We are in solitude, and we have by this the great advantage of being able, without any obstacle, to occupy ourselves with God alone. We are solitaries, and consequently delivered from the distractions which intercourse with creatures might cause us. We are solitaries, and thus our soul arrives more easily at union with God, the end of our vocation. We are solitaries, and consequently we can, without great difficulty, preserve our soul in purity, sheltered as we are from all human intimacies and all particular and dangerous friendships. But this kind of life is not without its snares; the principle ones pointed out by the masters of the spritual life are: vanity, self-complacency, want of exercise in the solid virtues which enrich and fortify the soul, a want of direction, the free use of our own will, etc.

Our holy Rule, in its wisdom and prudence, has willed that we be cenobites also, so that the exercise of the virtues of obedience, charity and humility, which are proper to community life, might efficaciously destroy the inconvenience which a complete solitude presents. Thus, while this common life shelters us from the dangers which solitude offers, our solitude, on its side, guards us against those of the cenobitical life, which are: dissipation of mind, wanderings of the heart, dangerous communications, aversions, hatred, jealousy, little pretentions, etc.

The little intercourse which we have among ourselves, and which is subject to direction, and the considerable length of time during which we remain in solitude, preserves us almost entirely from the dangers of the common life. On the other side, we have sufficient intercourse with our Superiors, with our equals and with our inferiors, to enjoy all the advantages of a common life, which are: sure direction, good example, the exercise of charity, dependence, patience, sweetness, support of different characters, the practice of renunciation, self-abnegation and sacrifice. Our holy Father St. John of the Cross expressly recommends us to remember that we "have come to Religion to be cut, chiselled and polished by the members of the Community, who are as so many ministers and officers sent by God to form and perfect us."

How, in effect, can we practise obedience if no one commands us? How practise humility without humiliations, and is it not our mutual intercourse that furnishes us with them? How exercise charity, console the afflicted, care for and relieve the sick and the infirm; how practise patience, if we are alone? Again, a real advantage which the common life affords us is the expansion of mind by which we afterwards find more strength to occupy ourselves with God and spiritual things. This is why our holy Mother St. Teresa has wished us to have hours of recreation and extraordinary recreation days, during which we might have edifying and agreeable conversations together, which, while unbending the mind, afford the heart more facility to inflame itself with divine love when, re-entering solitude, it commences anew the exercise of the Presence of God and of intimate intercourse with Him. It is then that, enclosing itself once

more in this separate cell, the soul enjoys the happiness of entertaining itself with God alone, and of occupying itself sweetly and lovingly in His Divine Presence, at one time, with His adorable perfections, at another, with His amiable goodness, then again, with His lessons and divine word; it is then that it speaks and listens to Him, to beg for and to receive a knowledge of the secrets of the interior life; to study the practice of the virtues most dear to His Heart and which will render it agreeable in His eyes; it is then that the soul arms herself against the attacks of her enemies, and there she takes good resolutions to correct her defects, to repair her faults, and to advance in perfection.

This separate cell, according to the expression of the Rule, *is assigned by order of the Prior, and with the consent of the other Religious*. It is not then left to the will of each one to choose a cell and retire there: she must have a vocation, recognized by legitimate authority; moreover, the Community must be able to conceive the hope that this soul will glorify God in her solitude. It is necessary that the wiser part of the Community consent to her admission; for, to be given a cell here, thus our ancient Mothers explain it, means the admission into the Monastery of a subject who is received by the secret votes of the wiser part of the Community, that is to say, the members who, by their age, their experience, their virtues, their interior spirit and their lights, are most capable of discerning a good vocation, of being able to see if the subject presented is fit for the solitary and the common life, and if she offers sufficient guarantees which permit them to hope that she will become perfectly united to the other members of the Community, without troubling the quiet and peace which reign in the Monastery.

This is a point of great importance, which merits our serious attention. The good order or the ruin of a Community depends upon the subjects admitted; and it is for this reason that only the wiser members are called upon to judge and decide in so difficult a matter, for, one must rather consider what a subject will be in the future than what it actually is. It is therefore necessary to pray much before admitting a subject, in order to receive from our Lord the light necessary to decide in an affair of such

great importance, the consequences of which might prove so fatal.

Our holy Mother St. Teresa confirms this truth by saying that it is very difficult to know women, that it is only time and experience that discovers what they are. Postulants and Novices, having very little intercourse with the members of the Community, it follows that, with the exception of the Prioress and their Mother Mistress, the greater part of the Chapter Sisters might become greatly embarrassed in forming a positive judgment concerning them, being able to base their opinions only upon appearances, which are not always the expression of interior dispositions; whence it follows that, besides having recourse to prayer to receive light from on high, it is well to take into account the judgment of the Superiors, Prioress, and the Mistress of Novices, who alone know intimately the subjects proposed.

Nevertheless, as we have already said, they can only give us hopes, and not assurances. What can we expect and promise from a field of green wheat in the month of March or April? What can we promise concerning a young tree which shows as yet only leaves, and perhaps, some flowers?

However, with the aid of some indications specified by our holy Mother St. Teresa in her Constitutions, Superiors may base their judgment upon serious foundations, which are characteristic signs of a call from God to our holy Order. "The Novices to be received," she says, "should be persons of prayer, who aspire to Religious perfection and despise the world. They should be healthy and have a good understanding." The desire for perfection, disengagement from the world, and a good judgment, form together dispositions which permit us to hope that the subject presented will be capable of being formed according to the spirit of the Rule. As to the rest, the presentation of Postulants and Novices, by the mere fact that it is made by Superiors upon whom rests, in a great measure, the responsibility of such an act, ought to influence us in their favor; and except for evidently contrary reasons and proofs, we may, in all security of conscience, give them our vote. After the admission of a subject, we should forbid ourselves all uneasiness about our vote, and abandon the result entirely to God, who

would not have permitted us to go against His will when we sought and desired purely to follow It.

The secrecy recommended about the suffrages of those who vote ought to be observed very rigorously. First, before the voting; in order to allow the Holy Spirit to enlighten the consciences of the Chapter Sisters, we should forbid ourselves absolutely all communication of our personal opinions, which might occasion serious errors. After the voting, the most absolute silence ought to be kept; any indiscretion on this point might prove very grave, for it could lead to a want of union of hearts; and the subjects to whom we have not given our vote, coming to hear of it, might receive a painful impression, and one which, perhaps, might never be effaced. If, in the admission of young Sisters, one has acted through passion or prejudice, prudence would again make it a law to keep the most complete silence upon the subject.

SECOND POINT.

Do we not find in the practice of this Chapter of our holy Rule, great facility for acquiring the spirit of penance and mortification, since it requires of us the retrenchment of all that could still give to the soul some little human consolation; that is to say, the pleasures of society, the enjoyment of intimate friendships, and those consolations which intercourse with persons of piety, learning and virtue could procure us?

To how many mortifications and privations is not that soul subject which lives alone in a separate cell, where no one sees or suspects what she has to suffer in her body, in her mind and in her heart? When many of us are together, our sufferings cannot long remain hidden, whence it results that reliefs and consolations soon follow; but when we are alone, without any other witness than God, it is under His eye and for His love that we must endure our sufferings, whether physical or moral, often even without receiving any consolation from our Creator, Who is pleased thus to prove the souls who are most dear to Him.

But, if in our cell we find ample food for the spirit of mortification, our intercourse with our Sisters does not deprive us of the exercise of this virtue, particularly if we wish to be very virtuous; to retrench

in these relations with them all that favors our own interest; to resist our inclinations; to surmount our repugnances; to make no account of our natural aversions; to forget ourselves and devote ourselves to the good of others; to desire to be the least and to be subject to all, without pretending to command anyone; to be always respectful and docile to those who are our Superiors; always affable, thoughtful, patient, obliging towards our equals; always kind, indulgent, in good humor with our inferiors; in a word, always humble and charitable towards all. Assuredly, by such an exercise, we cannot but strengthen in our soul the spirit of mortification and abnegation.

Let us join to all this the observance of all the rules prescribed for the hours of recreation, for those times and circumstances when we are permitted to communicate with our Sisters. Here, we must make use of signs to make ourselves understood without speaking; there, we must speak so low as to be heard only by her to whom we speak, and to do this in words so few, that to say one more than necessary, is a fault which ought to be repaired on the spot. We must sit near the Sister for whom we have the least inclination, if on her side of the recreation room a vacant place is to be found. Now, we must be silent and listen when we might wish to speak ourselves, then, we must give up our opinion for that of another; and when the signal is given, we must separate from one another without saying one word more.

In fine, the solitary and the community life united, furnish the soul with a perpetual exercise of mortification and renunciation, which will lead it to self-abnegation, and singularly aid it to acquire the perfect spirit of prayer and of union with God.

The difficulties with which we may meet in our relations with the Religious of the house, and those which we find in solitude, impose upon us the necessity of having recourse to God, of drawing close to Him, of enlightening and fortifying ourselves in His Presence. If, on the contrary, our unguarded nature enjoys a certain pleasure in communicating with others, or in remaining alone by natural attraction,

at the expense of duty, a need will at once make itself felt of renouncing this enjoyment and of seeking God and His glory; and from this arises a new necessity of having recourse to prayer and of uniting ourselves to God, in order to separate ourselves from ourselves.

Thus, it is upon the ruins of the "ego,"—the great obstacle to the reign of God within us,—that is built up that perfect charity from which springs the true spirit of zeal. God then fills the whole capacity of this heart, emptied of itself and of all created things; the soul is, in some sort, divinized; the thoughts and sentiments of the Master Who possesses it, replace those mean little researches of self-love and personal interest. As God, in all His works, has no other end than His Own glory and the good of souls, so, the law of love, to which she subjects herself, does not permit her to act in a different way. As God has given His only Son for the salvation of souls, she gives her will and all that she is, for the same end. What a marvelous transformation! And how is it effected? By solitude, well observed.

Let us consider a soul at the commencement of her Religious life, still full of self and of the remembrance of the world, which, led by the Spirit of God, not knowing where she goes nor what she wishes, arrives at this separate cell: a trembling of heart seizes her perhaps, nature shudders, self-love is terrified; but grace sustains her. She fixes her dwelling in this solitude, notwithstanding the revolts and the repugnances of nature. Mortifications are burdensome to her; it matters not, she remains faithful. Little by little, the despoiling of self takes place; prayer enlightens and fortifies her; soon she is no longer recognizable, so much has she become raised above herself; she is now filled with the triple spirit of Carmel, because she has been faithful to the spirit of solitude, faithful to remain in her cell, the walls of which she now kisses, as did St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, while thinking of the ineffable happiness which she has found in it. And when duty obliges her to leave it, following the example of St. Catherine of Sienna, she makes a solitude in her heart where she

remains entirely united to God, while communicating with her neighbor, which renders her intercourse with others profitable to souls and glorious to God.

THIRD POINT

Examples

Our Lord is our great example in the point of the Rule upon which we are now meditating. He had nothing to fear from the dangers of intercourse with men, nevertheless, He passes the greater part of His life withdrawn from creatures; and during the three years which He consecrated to the preaching of His Gospel, He often retired apart from the multitude. It would seem that He thus withdrew into solitude in order to draw new strength to labor for the good of souls and to fulfill the mission which His heavenly Father had confided to Him.

Let us consider Him in the desert, at the commencement of His public life, fasting, suffering, praying, tempted by the devil; and, at this school of Jesus Himself, let us learn how we ought to live in our little desert, united to Him and glorifying God by our mortifications, our prayers, our combats. Again, let us look at this good Master in the Garden of Olives: what a terrible struggle did He not have to sustain in that solitude! But at the same time what strength did He not there find to drink to the dregs the Chalice of His Passion!

Oh! what mysteries of love have taken place in the silence of retirement, and how much more would take place if only we appreciated the advantages of this separate cell!

The mystery of the Incarnation came to pass in a little solitary room. Would the divine Mary have received the visit of the celestial messenger, if she had not guarded her solitude faithfully? It was there that God willed to find her at the hour fixed for the accomplishment of this great Mystery. At the solemn moment, chosen by Him from all eternity, the Word descended from Heaven and became incarnate

in the bosom of this pure Virgin. What an example for us! What an encouragement to love our cell, to remain there faithfully, and not to leave it for light reasons! What a loss if, at an hour when we absent ourselves from it without a real necessity, God had designed to visit us in a particular manner, and to grant us some grace which should have powerfully aided us to glorify Him and to render our intercourse with our neighbor profitable, as was that of the holy Virgin after the accomplishment of the Mystery of the Incarnation!

What graces did not our holy Mother Teresa receive in her cell! With what favors was not our Lord pleased to fill her in that place which obedience had assigned to her! Our Lord Himself had made her understand from her most tender years the advantages of solitude, for we read in her life that, together with her young brother, she constructed little hermitages where she could retire to give herself up to prayer. She herself tells us the grave prejudice caused to her own soul by the great facility she possessed, during some time, of conversing with creatures and frequenting the parlors; and it was also the experience of the dangers she had incurred which made her conceive and carry into execution this plan of the Reform, which makes of our Monasteries so many solitudes, and of each of our cells a true hermitage. She has also said that, if obedience does not call us elsewhere, we should always remain by preference in solitude, and sigh for the moment of returning to it, once necessity has constrained us to leave.

The lives of the Saints furnish us with numerous proofs of the advantages of the solitary life for the spiritual advancement of souls. See St. Ignatius after his conversion: what graces, what lights, did he not receive from Heaven in his solitude at Manresa! It was there that he laid the foundations of that magnificent edifice which procures so much glory to God. And St. Francis in his retreat on Mount Alverno, what did he not learn at the school of the Holy Spirit! It was there that our Lord dictated

to him that admirable rule which has formed so many Saints who have been the glory of the Church.

Let us transport ourselves in spirit upon the Mountain of Carmel, into the deserts of the Thebaid; let us enter into these separate cells and there we shall find souls despoiled of all things, divinized in some sort, by silence and the repose of prayer.

Let us now turn upon ourselves, and call to mind that, in giving us separate cells, our holy Mother had the intention of our being true hermits, and souls elevated to this high perfection of union with God.

FOURTH POINT

Examen.

Let us now compare our conduct with that of true solitaries, and let us see what there remains for us to do in order to reach such perfection.

Are we exact to the duty of remaining in our cell? Do we not seek occasions and pretexts for leaving it? Do we foresee our duties in order to avoid going out uselessly? Are we careful to recommend ourselves to our good Angel, so that he may preserve us from the occasions of falling with which we might meet out of our retreat? Do we never leave the cell in thought? Do we not seek to look through the windows and slits of the doors at what is passing without? Do we not leave the door open in such a way as to see and be seen? Do we not reason upon the changes of cell, and are we indifferent whether we are assigned to one or to another? Do we not inconvenience those of our Sisters who are near us, by our bustle and noise, in such a way that, although they are in a separate cell, they are as fatigued from our nearness to them as if we were lodged in the same cell?

Do we appreciate the greatness of the grace which has been given us in having been admitted into the Monastery, and in having been given this cell which is a sanctuary where God is pleased to entertain Him-

self with us? Is our heart grateful, and filled with affection for the Superiors and the members of the Community who have done us this charity, and who have procured for us so great a happiness? On the contrary, is not our conduct of such a nature as to make them regret that they have admitted us into this holy solitude, the peace of which we perhaps trouble? Have we made any progress in the spirit of the Primitive Rule, and thus corresponded to the designs which God had in view in calling us to this sublime vocation? Is our life one of privation, mortification, silence, recollection, prayer, union with God, and forgetfulness of self? Is zeal for the glory of God and the good of souls, our interior occupation?

Do we support with resignation the sufferings of mind and heart which result from the privations which so great a solitude imposes upon us? Have we not tried to procure for ourselves unnecessary reliefs? Not appreciating all the advantages of this life of privation, of sufferings supported in silence under the eye of God alone, have we not complained or murmured? Has not self-love made us conceal those ailments and indispositions which it was our duty to make known to our Superiors and which, later on, necessitated dispensations from the observance of the rule of silence and solitude?

Has not vanity, and not the love of God, been sometimes the motive of our mortifications, to the grave prejudice of our health? Have we not been scandalized at others who, in simplicity, acknowledged their weakness and used reliefs authorized by obedience, the humiliation of which compensated for the suffering they relieved? Have we not become impatient and disedified at the noise and bustle which our Sisters in neighboring cells have made through inadvertence or necessity, while we ourselves have had no regard for the quiet of others? Have we not spoken of the going and coming of a Sister who is obliged to do this by reason of her office, or through obedience, while we ourselves are met everywhere and at all hours out of our cell, without any serious or legitimate motive for leaving it? In fine, are we

really in solitude with God alone, like the ancient solitaries? Do we not remain there with all our personal interests?

How have we behaved ourselves on extraordinary recreation days, and during the hours of ordinary recreation? Have we then brought forth the fruit of the graces received in solitude? Have we then shown and preserved that peace of God which gives so much sweetness to intercourse with our neighbor; that humility which gives pain to no one and which never takes offense; that entire disengagement from the world and ourselves which excludes from our conversations all that is opposed to the spirit of God, with which a Religious soul should always be filled? Generally, from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh; now, what are our ordinary conversations? By this examen we may judge what degree of prayer and union with God we have attained.

Are we always attentive to avoid too great a familiarity with anyone, or relations too intimate which might easily degenerate into particular friendships? Have we not imprudently given our confidence to others? Have we not often given and maintained our opinion in opposition to persons, who, by their age or virtue, were our superiors?

Have we not given ourselves up to dissipation, or, by a contrary excess, have we not been too serious and too much concentrated within ourselves during the time destined for conversation and recreation?

In our relations with our Sisters, concerning our office or work, have we always been religious, charitable, agreeable, and full of gentleness? Does not our conscience reproach us with having been abrupt in our manners, sharp in our words, impatient in our movements, or ill-humored? Are we always disposed to render services to others, and ready to inconvenience ourselves to oblige them, without desiring any return? Do we treat those who are above us with respect and deference? Are we kind and conciliating with our equals, patient and indulgent with our inferiors? In fine, do all find us cordial, agreeable, charitable, cheerful, gentle, and modest?

Let us also interrogate our conscience concerning the admission of subjects. If we have had some embarrassing doubts, have we consulted only God and our Superiors? Have we not acted through human motives, from self-love, or interest? Have we kept a rigorous silence, not making known our views, either by word or sign, and not seeking to penetrate into those of others? Have we observed all these rules of prudence before, during, and after their admission?

Let our conscience reply to these questions and the result should lead us either to humble and correct ourselves if we are guilty, or to praise and thank God if we are not.

CHAPTER FOURTH

FIRST MEDITATION.

On Eating Together in a Common Refectory.

Text: *You shall eat together in Refectory, what may have been given you in alms, hearing usually some part of the Holy Scripture read, when this can be conveniently done. None of the Religious shall leave the cell assigned to him, nor exchange it with another, without leave from the Prior for the time being.*

FIRST POINT.

We have seen that our holy Rule, in a preceding Chapter, makes it an obligation for the Brethren to dwell separately, each one in the cell which shall have been assigned him by the Prior; in the present point it introduces a slight modification in the rigor of their solitude by prescribing that the Brethren take their meals together in a common Refectory, after which, it continues to speak of that which was the subject of the preceding Chapter, that is to say, of the cells of the Religious, declaring that no one can change his cell without the consent of the Prior. We shall explain successively each of these two points.

The Primitive Rule, such as it had been written by St. Albert, ordained that each Religious should take his repast separately, in his own cell. The Sovereign Pontiff, Innocent IV, in order to remedy the inconveniences resulting from this point of the Primitive Rule, introduced the obligation of a Refectory in which to take their meals in common while listening to the reading of the Holy Scripture.

We shall then stop, in the first place, at what is here prescribed upon the subject of this refection in common, and we shall see that the three principal dispositions in which we should take our meals are:

I. In a spirit of poverty, of humility and of mortification: *That which may have been given you in alms.*

II. In a spirit of union and fraternal charity: *You shall eat together in a common Refectory.*

III. In a spirit of recollection and piety. *Hearing usually some part of the Holy Scripture read.*

I. The spirit of poverty, of humility and gratitude: *What may have been given you in alms.*

It is only to the poor that alms are given; and a tribute of gratitude is expected in return for what has been given, were it only a thing of no value, nay, even refuse.

We find in these few words: first, our profession of poverty, which should be practised in our nourishment. Second, the spirit of humility, of mortification and of gratitude with which we should take our meals.

First, we are poor, since we live on alms. The poor are the children of Providence, from Whose Hands they accept all things: abundance, when it is given them; privation, when God judges proper to impose it upon them. This is why our holy Constitutions say in Chapter IV: "It is difficult to fix an hour to dine for those who know not when they may have food to eat." In such a way, that if it happens, as we have sometimes seen, that even necessities are wanting, they bless God, confiding in His goodness which will never abandon them.

All the food which is served us in the Refectory should be marked with the seal of poverty, nevertheless, what is necessary should be provided, while avoiding all superfluity and also what is evidently injurious to the health; delicate meats, dressed with care, are never found upon the tables of the poor, where we often see nothing but pieces of black bread, sometimes dried up or moldy; a little soup, badly seasoned; some remains of food which perhaps should have been thrown to animals, if these poor persons had not presented themselves to receive it. What is there here to attract sensuality and delicacy of taste? Scarcely sufficient wherewith to satisfy the most imperious needs of nature! It is then at this table of the poor that a child of Carmel should be seated, in order to gain that strength of which she has need to continue to suffer and to bear the cross after her good Master.

Second, we should take this nourishment in a spirit of poverty, that is to say, with sobriety, mortification, humility and gratitude: such are the dispositions of the truly poor in spirit. Thus, let us remember that we are poor, and then it will be easy for us to understand the sentiments which ought to animate us when taking our meals. Where is the really poor who is not content with what is given him; who murmurs if his taste and appetite are not satisfied, either as to the quality, or quantity; who complains of not being served as properly and as delicately

as the rich from the remains of whose table he is fed? When we are poor, can we choose our food, since we must receive it from the hand of a stranger? Should we not esteem ourselves happy that someone thinks of giving us an alms, and should we not receive it with feelings of gratitude towards the charitable person, and towards God Who inspires the thought of giving it?

Oh! let us be poor in truth, very mortified,, full of confidence in God, of a spirit of faith, and of gratitude for the care He takes of us, for it is He Who gives us alms, it is He Who serves us. How then can we complain, how can we wish for anything else but what He Himself gives us? How can we regret the "flesh pots and onions of Egypt"? How can we fail to find excellent what has been chosen, prepared and distributed by Himself? How can we fail to bless and to thank Him for it?

To sum up all: by the sole fact of our profession of poverty, reason alone tells us that we should content ourselves with the food of the poor. The spirit of poverty makes us desire only the common nourishment, the spirit of mortification and humility forbids all complaints, all murmurs, all attention to the fancies of nature, for nothing is due to us. The spirit of faith and the love of God make us receive with joy and gratitude what Divine Providence deigns to bestow; closing our eyes to the quality, quantity, properties and effects of the food served us; considering only the bounty of our Heavenly Father Who has promised us by His Divine Son, our Lord, that He will always provide for all our needs, not according to our views, but according to His Own, for our greater good.

II. The spirit of union and of fraternal charity.

Our holy Rule ordains that we eat what has been given us in alms, in the Refectory, and not elsewhere: *You shall eat together in Refectory*. This is not a simple counsel: *You SHALL eat*. . . These words of the Rule oblige us to assist at the common repast in the place destined for it. Many reasons show us the necessity and the advantages of this.

The first, and that which is most capable of touching our hearts, is the presence of our Lord Who presides there, Who has promised to be found always where two or three are assembled in His Name. When our Lord

presides at a reunion, He does not remain there idle; He is there with abundance of graces, to pour them out upon the souls who are faithful to repair to the place and at the hour appointed,—faithful to be found there with the spirit of poverty, humility, love and confidence; and He distributes these graces with greater abundance in proportion as He sees us more generous in surmounting our repugnances and in practising mortification and renunciation. He reads all hearts, He sees all that passes there, and it is with pleasure that He compensates us for all the little sacrifices which we have made so as to repair there exactly at the hour prescribed and to conform ourselves to the Community in what is served to all, by His order, in the Refectory.

A second reason is that of the efficacy of prayer in common. The whole Community prays before and after the repast; all hearts unite in blessing God, and in thanking Him for his benefits; all implore graces for those who, by His divine inspiration, have given us alms, and this union of prayer is very agreeable to God and renders Him propitious to us.

Thirdly, the force of good example is one of the advantages of a common Refectory. We there mutually support, aid and encourage one another to surmount repugnances and to partake of food which, perhaps, we should not have the strength to touch if left to ourselves.

In the fourth place, the miraculous graces which we receive by overcoming ourselves in order to go to the Refectory with the Community and to eat there what the others eat, are not a slight reason to engage us to perform this duty with fidelity. Yes, the soul and the body receive there singular, innumerable, and inappreciable graces. How many times, after a generous determination not to listen to the claims and repugnances of nature, we find ourselves freed from the difficulties which we experienced, and on account of which we should have willingly dispensed ourselves from the common fare? How many times has food which seemed likely to be injurious become salutary, when, instead of listening to ourselves and putting it aside to take other food, we ate it in the spirit of faith and for the love of God? How many times after entering sick into the Refectory, we have

left it well, not because of the quality of the nourishment, but on account of the spirit of faith with which we have taken it?

III. The spirit of recollection and piety.

In the common Refectory we are preserved from a multitude of temptations which might make us fall into many faults if we were alone; and one of the principal perservatives is the reading which we hear there and which the Rule ordains in these words: *Hearing usually some part of the Holy Scripture read.* Our weakness is so great that a nothing makes us fall; a slight repugnance makes us commit an act of immortification and renders us unfaithful to the spirit of our vocation. The least flattering of our appetite is also capable of making us prefer the satisfaction of our taste to the accomplishment of our duty. We easily allow ourselves to be drawn away by sensible and material things, which, if we do not take care, will materialize us when we thus identify ourselves with them. The reading which we hear in the Refectory, while occupying our mind and nourishing our heart, gives strength to our soul, raising it above itself, and thus preventing it from lowering itself to the level of the beast; and this is what would happen if we occupied ourselves only with this animal action, without joining to it a spiritual act.

Let us then appreciate this reading which facilitates for us the means of elevating ourselves to God. Let us recall what St. Bernard has said on this subject: "We should not," says he, "when we eat, lower and lose ourselves in this corporal nourishment; we should not apply ourselves wholly to this gross and carnal action; but should think of our soul and give it also its proper refection. Now, according to the words of Eternal Truth, the nourishment of the soul is the Holy Scripture." "Not by bread alone doth man live, but by every word which proceedeth from the mouth of God." This is what our Lord said to the demon when he tempted Him to gluttony; and it is what He says to us to make us understand how much greater care we should take of the nourishment of our soul than of our body.

The reading of a good book in the Refectory is then very necessary. Ah! if we could calculate the immense good which results from it, the temptations repressed by

this means, the faults avoided, the good desires formed, the acts of virtue practised, and the salutary impressions received, we should be more attentive to listen to the reading and more careful to read well when we ourselves perform this office.

Alas! how little we think of our true interest, when we allow the faculties of our soul to abase themselves so low as to be occupied with vile food, instead of leaving the body to sustain itself, and employing them in more worthy functions!

Think of the immense difference which exists between a Religious who concentrates her attention entirely upon what is, or what is not served her in the Refectory, or on what she wishes should be served, and a Religious who tries to identify herself with the Saints whose life or writings are being read, with the Holy Spirit Who dictated the Holy Scriptures, or with our Divine Lord Whose doctrine and examples are being developed in the matter read. What a difference between them, although in appearance they resemble each other! They may be side by side and served alike, but in reality they are very far from each other. Who can measure the distance which separates them? He who measures that between heaven and earth. He Who estimates the difference which exists between matter and spirit. Which of these two do you wish to be? She who ranks herself among the animals, or she who keeps to her proper rank, in the company of God and the Saints?

After having prescribed how the repast is to be conducted, our holy Rule again takes up the matter of which it had begun to treat in the preceding Chapter, and ordains that none of the Religious can change his cell without permission of the Prior: *None of the Religious shall leave the cell assigned to him, nor exchange it with another, without leave from the Prior for the time being.*

Here, again, is a check upon nature, always eager for what pleases and rebellious to that which mortifies it. It is well that in our Monasteries the cells are all more or less alike, having no other ornaments than those of holy poverty, and this should render us as indifferent in regard to them as are the dead to which sepulchre they occupy; nevertheless, self-love, always alert and ingenious, knows how to discover in the various cells great differ-

ences which excite its preferences, while it renders intolerable to us a cell which has been assigned by the Prioress. At one time, it is the air that is wanting, or the light; we desire a better exposure, a little more sun, or fresh air; again, it is noise which inconveniences us, or the proximity of a Sister who causes us some temptation. Give self-love the liberty of complaining, of manifesting its tastes, of demanding what it requires, of indicating its pretended rights in favor of age, of health, of employments, . . . and, immediately, what trouble, what inquietude, what discontent, what disorder, in the bosom of the Community!

The Rule remedies all this; each one must keep the cell assigned to her, being careful to take in good part the little inconvenience which she may meet with there and which will give her the occasion of practising mortification, renunciation, patience, endurance and charity. If important reasons cause us to believe a change necessary, we should in this, as in all other things, make them known to the Prioress in all simplicity, at the same time endeavoring to maintain ourselves in a holy indifference, and to submit without reasoning to what she shall judge proper to decide.

Let us bless our Lord a thousand and a thousand times for having called us to the observance of a Rule which preserves us from so many faults and miseries, to which we should naturally be subject if we had not this bridle to restrain us.

SECOND POINT.

Does not the spirit of penance and mortification find the wherewith to nourish itself in the exact practice of this point of the Rule? What difficulties to be surmounted to go to the Refectory at the proper hour and to conform ourselves in all things to the Community; what mortification of our senses in the common nourishment, which is coarse, poor, and contrary to our taste and appetite; in the regularity to be observed as to the position, the religious modesty, and the ceremonies which precede, accompany and follow the common repast; what mortification of the mind, in the attention to be given to the reading, in the vigilance to repulse thoughts suggested by the repugnances and requirements of nature, and to substitute for them holy and spiritual ones. . . .

If the spirit of prayer and union with God is easily lost in sumptuous feasts and repasts, where nature presides and directs, there is no doubt that where poverty and mortification reign, the spirit of prayer is nourished and union with God becomes more intimate; again, it is certain, that attention to the reading, while facilitating the practice of mortification, gives food to the soul and raises it above itself.

The spirit of zeal for the glory of God cannot fail to be increased by the practice of mortification, by good thoughts and holy affections, by fidelity to regular observance, through a spirit of faith, and vigilance over ourselves for the love of God, by the examples and maxims of the Saints, the writings of the holy Fathers, and the doctrine and morals of the Holy Gospel.

In fine, this point of our holy Rule, practised to its full extent, aids us to attain the perfection of the spirit of our holy vocation, in making us rise by the practise of an entire self-renunciation into the region of pure love, where our soul, disengaged from all that flatters the senses, emptied of all that is not God, is filled entirely with Him, and lives intimately united to Him.

THIRD POINT

Examples

After He had fasted forty days in the desert, our Lord was hungry: the demon, hoping to make use of this necessity of nature to destroy, by a momentary weakness, all the glory which God would draw from so rigorous a fast, accomplished with so much perfection, dared to approach and tempt Him. Jesus was hungry: if He willed it, He could have procured the nourishment He needed; the tempter proposed to Him the working of a miracle, unseasonably and without necessity; he presented to Him a stone that He might change it into bread. But as it is neither the time, nor the place, nor the manner in which to take this refection, the evil spirit is repulsed by some words from the Holy Scripture, and Jesus took His repast only at the hour and in the place appointed by His Heavenly Father.

How many times has this same tempter, taking advantage of a craving of nature to attack us, tried to induce us to take our meal at another time than the hour appointed for the Community, in another place than the common Refectory, and of food of a better quality? At such times, let us love to recall this example of our good Master and try to unite ourselves to Him by generously conforming our conduct to His.

Let us transport ourselves in spirit to the home of the Holy Family, that small but model Community, where all is done in the order of God. It is the hour of the common meal: let us consider the frugality, the poverty and the simplicity of the food served upon that table; let us contemplate the grave demeanor, the modesty of those holy personages, the submission of the divine Mary to Joseph, her saintly Spouse, and that of our Lord to Mary and Joseph. Let us not content ourselves with entering the humble house of Nazareth and considering only the exterior action of the august family; let us penetrate also into their interior, and endeavor to understand how their souls are raised above the natural function, in which necessity engages them, by an intention so pure and views so elevated. Do we there discover any movement of nature which makes them lose sight for a single moment of the one end of all their actions: the glory of God? Do we hear them discourse upon the quality, the quantity and the properties of their food? Do we see them put aside that which is poor and badly seasoned, do we see them become saddened and depressed because of the mortifications they meet with in their repast? No, the faculties of their soul are all abyssed in God.

At the Last Supper, where our Lord presides with so much love, Judas, preoccupied with things of this earth and agitated by passion, listens not to the word of God; he draws no profit from the advice, the remonstrances of our Lord, nor from the graces which He sheds upon all the others. We see him serve himself according to his own will, and put his hand into the dish at the same time as the Divine Master, notwithstanding the warning which he had received from

His mouth, and which ought to touch and convert him. What follows? He leaves the Community before the time, he betrays His Master, he perishes miserably after the consummation of his crime. At that same table, St. John, faithful to his Divine Master, forgets the material function in which he is engaged, elevates his soul above all terrestrial things, loses himself in God, and, reposing with confidence and love upon the bosom of his Master, receives from Him a celestial nourishment which makes him increase in perfection and sanctity, and communicates to him sufficient strength to follow our Lord to Calvary, while all the others abandon Him.

In the Monasteries of the Reform where our holy Mother Teresa was Prioress, this point of the Rule was practised perfectly; and Divine Providence was there pleased to perform prodigies. Thus we read in the Chronicles of the Order that, in the Convent of Toledo, it happened one day that they were in want of bread, not only for the Community, but, not even a piece was to be found for a sick Sister who had great need of it.—Assuredly, when one is reduced to such poverty, one does not think of serving in the Refectory delicate meats tastily prepared.—Now, in this great extremity, two baskets of excellent bread were suddenly found in the Monastery, without any one being able to discover whence they came; and they had wherewith to sustain the Community abundantly, while the remains were distributed, by order of our holy Mother, to a great number of poor.

Our holy Father St. John of the Cross, as we read in his life, showed an exemplary regularity while in office, as well as when under obedience. The first sound of the bell which called him to an exercise, whatever it might be, was for him the Voice of God; he left all, and, like the ancient solitaries of the desert, would leave a letter unfinished in order to obey the call.

He was accustomed to say that there were two exercises at which a Superior should never fail to be present; that of the Choir, and that of the Refectory; the first, in order to chant the praises of God with

his Religious, and to watch over them so that an action so holy might always be accomplished with the gravity and devotion proper to it; the second, in order that no Religious be served better food than another; for this inequality, always so odious, appeared to him monstrous in a Community, and he regarded it as a source of murmurs for some, and of ambition and sensuality for others.

As the reading in Refectory is a very important point of the Rule, it is well to remark here that, in our Monasteries, we should avoid seeking studied elegance in our lecture books, both common and private; and that often the most simple reading is that which nourishes the soul best. Thus, we should not forget that simplicity ought to be found in the nourishment which Religion distributes to our soul, as well as in that which she gives to our body. That which flatters the mind too much, nourishes self-love and dries up the heart.

We read also in the life of our holy Father St. John of the Cross, an example in support of this truth. A Doctor of the University of Salamanca, to whom this great Master of the interior life had given the habit of the Discalced Carmelites, took upon himself, one day, to say to the Saint that he was astonished to see so few books in the house, though they were very necessary in order to form the mind to science and to nourish the heart with piety. The holy man, without seeking to represent to him that a Community only recently founded, and so poor, was not able as yet to furnish itself with books, wished to prove to him by experience that it is not a multitude and a diversity of books which imparts true science and forms Saints, but that it is rather the humility and good dispositions which one brings to the reading. For this reason he took from him the few books he had, even those of devotion which are given to Novices, and allowed him only the small Catechism usually given to children, with the order to commence its study by these first words: "Are you a Christian?" and to make serious reflections upon the deep meaning hidden in them. This lesson, which the young

Doctor did not expect, was more profitable to him than all those which he had learned in Theology. Docile to the teaching of his Father Master, he went each day as simple as a child, to give him an account of the reflections which he had made upon this first truth of Christianity. He did this with so much simplicity, and derived from it so much consolation, that he shed tears of joy; and he drew from it so much profit, and so solid a nourishment for his soul that, from a perfect Christian, he became a perfect solitary; he afterwards occupied worthily the highest offices in the Order, and he sanctified himself while sanctifying others.

Those two fervent Novices were truly occupied with the reading and with holy affections, who when taking their meal did not notice that some decayed blood, which the Brother Infirmarian had left near the serving table, had been put by mistake at their place in the Refectory, and they found it so excellent that upon being interrogated by the Prior concerning the food which had been served to them, they said that they did not know what it was, but that they had never before tasted anything so good.

St. Bernard nourished his soul with the things of God during his repasts, as at all other times; thus he ate lard believing that he was eating butter, and drank oil thinking that it was water. In fine, he paid so little attention to the taste or quality of what was served him that, through this habitual mortification, he finally lost the sense of taste; and yet he always had very delicate health, an unhappy pretext which souls, wanting in the Religious spirit, often make use of when seeking to satisfy their tastes and requiring particular food for their nourishment.

Again, how many examples can we not find in the lives of the holy anchorites whom we honor as our Fathers! What attention to the things of God! What contempt for the sustenance of the body! What poor nourishment! Some few roots and wild herbs, without any seasoning other than the spirit of mortification and the love of God, which gave to their palates and to their stomachs the facility of eating

and of digesting food so insipid and so little calculated to flatter sensuality.

FOURTH POINT

Examen.

Let us examine ourselves seriously upon so important a point. Have we taken care to manage our time and arrange our occupations so that we might repair to the Refectory at the exact time? Under the slight pretext of little indispositions, or to finish some work that could easily be postponed, have we not asked to be dispensed from assisting at the common meal; not understanding that failing to be present at a Community act, through our own fault, is to renounce the graces attached to it, since they are given only to those who are faithful to assist at them, at least in will, if some just cause prevents them from being found there in person? Do we go to the Refectory with that spirit of faith which shows us Jesus there present, according to the promise which He has made, when He said: "When two or three shall gather together in my Name, I shall be in the midst of them"? Do we behave ourselves in the Refectory in a manner pleasing to our Lord, that is to say, by observing there all the prescribed regulations, showing a religious modesty, and practising mortification? Instead of listening to the Divine Master, through the reading which we hear, or in the good thought which He suggests to us, have we not listened only to the language of nature, attentive to all its pretended needs? Now, we must not dissimulate the fact that the imagination here plays an important part—it persuades us that such and such a food dressed in such and such a manner, may be injurious to us, whereas, if taken in a spirit of faith, it may perhaps have an effect upon our health altogether different from what we expect, for God has been pleased to recompense such acts of virtue by miracles.

The Chronicles of all Religious Orders furnish us with numerous examples in support of this truth, as we have shown above; and such Religious, entering sick into the Refectory, have found in the food,

which was naturally injurious to them, but which they seasoned with the salt of the spirit of faith, a remedy for their infirmities. Should we not then blush with shame and confusion at having surrendered before a grain of salt put in our food above the ordinary measure, when, as true daughters of our holy Mother St. Teresa, we ought, according as occasions present themselves, to brave the demon, the tyrants, and conquer or die upon the field of battle?

Have we not sometimes had this experience, that when we solicited some particular kind of food for our nourishment, God has permitted that instead of being thus relieved, the contrary has taken place? Since it is God Himself Who serves us, how can we fail to accept with gratitude what He presents? Have we not imitated the Israelites when they forgot that the manna had been miraculously sent them by Divine Providence? They became disgusted with it and asked for other meats. God, in punishment of their ingratitude, sent them what they desired; but in the act of eating the quails, they were struck dead.

Supposing that on this point we have nothing with which to reproach ourselves, have we not fallen into the opposite defect, that of taking pride in our exactitude, regularity and exterior mortification?

Have we not been disedified by the reliefs and the particular food which legitimate necessity and obedience caused others to use? Have we compassionated their infirmities, understanding the suffering which they felt at not being able to follow the Community? Have we considered the profit that their soul drew from this humiliation, instead of accusing them of delicacy and immortification?

Have we ourselves been obedient and humble when Superiors judged proper to grant us dispensations? Instead of loving the humiliation which this might cause us, have we not sought to avoid it? Has not a secret self-love, rather than the love of discipline, made us ask to go back to the common fare? Have we not accepted easily and even taken satisfaction in particular food prepared for us, when we

could partake of it without being seen, seeking on such occasions to take our meals at a different hour than that of the Community, or in another place than that of the Refectory?

Have we not spoken to others beside our Mother Prioress of our needs concerning our nourishment? Have we not, without permission, made known to the Sister Cook our tastes, either as to quality or quantity? When Cook ourselves, have we taken care that all the food be well prepared and properly served, without, however, seeking anything contrary to poverty? Have we had a charitable regard for the needs of our Sisters, according to the intentions of the Prioress, and conformable to what is recommended in our holy Constitutions? Have we not permitted ourselves the liberty of offering some particular food through fancy or caprice, through attachment to such or such a Sister, under pretext that a certain regard and better treatment should be shown to this one on account of her office, or to that one on account of her seniority? Have we always submitted to obedience in the seasoning of the food and in all the little details concerning the kitchen?

When Reader, how have we acquitted ourselves of this office? Have we taken care to mark in advance the books appointed, to foresee the difficulties with which we might meet, so that all might be read in its time and in the order prescribed? Have we recommended ourselves to our good Angel, so that we might acquit ourselves well of this office? Have we generously given out our voice in order to be heard by all, and not be, through our tepidity, the cause of the divine seed remaining unfruitful? Have we read with pause, correctly, observing the punctuations?

Have we not manifested our discontent at the manner in which others read, pointing out, without having the authority to do so, the defects which we have noticed, or making this understood by some indirect word, either in the presence of the Reader, or in her absence?

How have we acquitted ourselves of the office of

Server in the Refectory? Have we observed all the ceremonies, made all the prescribed inclinations, served and taken away the empty plates in the order indicated, making the rounds of the tables to see that nothing was wanting? Have we served with an interior spirit, in union with our Lord, Who, although He was the Sovereign Master, nevertheless, willed to take upon Himself the form of a servant, and have we had the intention of serving Him in the person of His Spouses? Have we blessed and thanked Him for having chosen us to distribute the alms of His Providence to His poor of predilection, while we were perhaps giving them miraculous nourishment, as did the Disciples when He multiplied bread and fish in favor of those who had inconvenienced themselves simply to follow Him? In fulfilling this office have we observed great modesty, seeking only to see what it was necessary for us to see and not occupying ourselves in observing anyone; but looking at the tables only through duty, in order to see that each Sister was provided with what was necessary?

Have we been equally faithful to observe silence at the serving-window, employing only signs for what we had to ask? Have we not permitted ourselves to make observations about the portions, to communicate our reflections exteriorly: none of these things belong to the Server, who should put her whole attention to the serving, and not to the quality of the food which she serves. Has it not sometime happened that, when Server, we have made known our personal needs without permission, or taken in bad part what has been given us to put at our place?

Our holy Constitutions prescribe practices of mortification in the Refectory, recommending this in order "not to lose spirit of devotion which is so beneficial the soul." Let us examine how we have acquitted ourselves of them. Have we done so in a spirit of faith and true humility of heart? Have we considered the mortifications in use as means for acquiring the perfection of our vocation? Have we performed them with the desire to repair our faults, and to receive the graces attached to them? Have we been

penetrated with the sentiments and interior dispositions proper to each one of these mortifications, for example, when prostrate at the door of the Refectory, kissing the feet, or begging pardon, have we sincerely recognized in mind and heart that we were not worthy to kiss the feet of our Sisters, that it would be an act of justice if they trod us under foot as something most vile and contemptible, and that it is true charity when they support and pardon us all our faults?

Have we understood that we have not satisfied the full extent of our obligation when we accomplish these exterior and momentary practices of humility, which should be but the expression of the habitual disposition of our heart, and that our entire conduct should be in conformity with these acts when an occasion presents itself? In effect, has it not often happened that, after having kissed the feet, with a rope around our neck like a criminal, and having publicly declared ourselves unworthy to live among the holy souls which surround us, we have shown ourselves as obstinate, as proud, as tenacious of our own opinions, as wanting in charity as we were before? What! we have called ourselves guilty only a few moments ago, and now, if someone makes a charitable observation to us, our self-love is aroused and furnishes us with a thousand reasons for excusing ourselves! Whence comes this contradiction? From a want of the interior spirit and of preparation of heart.

What then shall we do? Let us go to the root of the evil, in order to prevent so great a misfortune; let us understand the necessity of realizing in our conduct those dispositions of humility which we manifest when performing a mortification. In order to do this, let us unite ourselves to the humiliations of our Divine Master, let us beg of Him the grace not to be a pharisee in the habit and posture of a publican; let us act in such a way that our hearts may be in accord with our actions; let us make use of these acts of mortification to repress our self-love—that self-love which perhaps performs them only for its own advantage; let us correct that levity which makes us

so soon forget the good sentiments we had when performing a mortification, and which allows our humor and defects so soon to resume their sway.

Henceforth, let us try to be really more mild and humble, more patient and charitable, after an act of mortification, thus testifying our desire to practise these virtues. Let us perform all in a spirit of faith, and all will be profitable to us. Let us go to the common Refectory in this spirit, let us take there, in this spirit, the poor nourishment which is given us in alms; let us listen to the reading, or read ourselves, in this spirit; let us serve the Community and perform the customary penances in this same spirit; and God, Who is infinitely good and merciful, will not allow us to leave this Community act without pouring upon us abundant graces.

CHAPTER FOURTH—(Continued)

SECOND MEDITATION.

Text: The Prior's cell should be at the entrance of the Convent, in order that he may be the first to meet those who come there.

And everything is to be done according to his will and direction.

Each one shall remain in his cell or near it, meditating day and night on the law of the Lord, and watching in prayer, unless he be otherwise justly employed.

FIRST POINT.

The cell of the Prior: In reflecting upon these words, we see that the person in charge, who holds the place of God in the house, is to be lodged, like the other members of the Community, in a poor cell. The Rule does not say: the apartments, the lodgings, or other terms which would show a distinction in the place of his residence. The only difference which we can there discover is in the situation of his cell: *It should be at the entrance of the Convent.* And why? In order that the Prior may have more facility for the fulfillment of the duties of his office, directing all affairs within and without the Convent, and watching, like a sentinel, in order to guard the house of God. The words of the Rule are sufficiently clear, and show us in an evident manner that anything which the Prioress may have in particular is given to her for the common good, and not for her private satisfaction, nor for her personal convenience, nor as marks of distinction, honor, or dignity; and what the Rule says of the cell is completed by our holy Constitutions, Chapter XI, "Of Humility and Penance", where we read these words: "The Prioress should not be better served. : ." Thus, in our Monasteries, the Prioresses are honored, respected and loved as the representatives of God; but no mark of distinction nor anything particular in their lodging, food or clothing is assigned to them. The Rule orders only that their cell be situated in a suitable place, in such a way, that all the Sisters may have easy access to them, and, at the same time, that they themselves may be able conveniently to attend to external affairs. If in this cell is found any extra piece of furniture, such as a locker, or small chest, it is not for the personal use of the Prioress, but only to contain the keys of the

Monastery, and the books and papers which are necessary for her office. It is thus that we should understand these words: *The Prior's cell should be at the entrance of the Convent, in order that he may be the first to meet those who come there, and everything is to be done according to his will and direction.*

We remark in this point three important things which it will be well to develop somewhat: 1st. For the Prioress, a common life without anything particular. 2nd. The vigilance of the Prioress to direct all things within and without the Monastery. 3rd. The entire dependence of all the Religious in regard to the Prioress.

1st. We have said that the Prioress ought to lead a common life, without being more amply provided for than the other Religious. The Rule has in view the common good, and not the particular good of the person in charge. If the possession of anything particular by simple Religious is injurious to the common good because of the temptations which it occasions, the faults it causes them to commit, the customs of relaxation and irregularity it introduces; what should we not have to fear if these irregularities, exemptions and distinctions were found in Superiors, without necessity and only because of their office.

Example ordinarily effects what instruction imparts. What fruit can be produced by the exhortations, the observations, the corrections of a Prioress regarding regularity, poverty and mortification, if she is not the first to practise in deeds, what she teaches by her words? What a subject of temptation for inferiors! What a falling away of the Religious spirit in the whole Community! But, on the contrary, what profit for the common good when the Prioress follows the Rule punctually; when she does not take advantage of her office to be treated according to her taste and served as she desires! What force in her exhortations, when her hearers recognize that no recommendation comes from her mouth which is not the echo of her life! With what authority can she reprove a Religious when that Religious recognizes that the reproach is upheld by her example! How many souls there are for whom example alone suffices to make them walk in a good way, or to turn them from it, according as the example set is good or bad!

The particular good of the person in office also requires, as we have said, that she be treated like the rest. Although all say that exterior things are not hurtful to great souls, yet it remains none the less rigorously true that, however elevated a soul may be in virtue, there is always some danger to fear from good treatment, distinctions, and marks of honor. A Prioress is very much exposed by the exercise of the duties of her charge, and yet, she must remain a good and holy Religious. Already deprived of solitude and silence, occupied continually with affairs of all kinds, if to this be joined greater facility to satisfy nature, greater nicety or abundance in what she uses, she runs great risk of losing the Religious spirit entirely. Habits of dissipation and immortification are so quickly contracted in a manner of life which favors them! Humility is so exposed when everything exterior flatters self-love!

Without stopping longer upon this first consideration, let us pass on to the second, not, however, without having admired the wisdom of this point of the Rule.

2nd. *In order that he may be the first to meet those who come there.* The Rule wishes that the Prioress should have the supervision and direction of all that is done within the Monastery, and of all that comes in, or goes out: she is to be the first to know whatever news is brought to the Convent, and to judge whether or not it is to be communicated to the Religious; it is she who is to decide whether the persons who come to visit the Religious should or should not be received. To her belongs the superintendence of the turns, of the parlors, the entrance and going out of persons, in a word, all the intercourse of the interior with the exterior; upon her rests the responsibility of the disedification or scandal which might take place through a want of watchfulness concerning communication with seculars. The guarding of the Monastery is certainly a thing of great importance, since God makes it an obligation for the Prior not to lay this care upon any other person; for the Rule says expressly that he must be the *first to meet those who come there*. He must go himself to the door, and it is he who must judge and decide whether to receive or send away, according as he sees in the Presence of God, it will be a profit or a loss for the common good and for the glory of God. This

is a point which merits very special attention, for upon its exact observance depends the spiritual prosperity of the Community, in the same way that its ruin is assured if it be neglected.

Let us remark, in passing, that the title of Prioress is not an honorary title, but a charge, and a very laborious charge. If in the world, distinguished personages have domestics to receive those who present themselves, sentinels who guard their gates and allow no one to enter, except certain persons and at certain hours; if they abandon into strange hands the direction of their house, that they may be free to do, without disturbance, whatever pleases them, it is not so with the Prioress of Carmel, a sentinel herself by order of God, Who says to her by the mouth of a Prophet: "I have established you as a captain to watch over my people." She is the first to see persons from without, and it is only with her permission, and under her supervision, that they can treat with the Religious.

3rd. We have said, in the third place, that this point of the Rule obliges us to show great dependence towards the Prioress; for if the Rule makes it an obligation for her to watch over the spiritual and temporal affairs and to direct the whole house, it follows that all should be submissive to her, and the Religious should never undertake or decide anything, without previously knowing the intentions of the Prioress—*and everything is to be done according to his will and direction.* The terms are precise, let us pay attention to them, and understand well their meaning. If the Prioress is to know and direct all things, should not the Religious submit all to her, inform her of everything, and not take it in bad part when she is vigilant, when she asks questions and makes it her duty to know all that takes place? Thus, things of importance, as also those which appear insignificant, should be submitted to her; all must be executed according to her desires and intentions, or her express order. No Religious is dispensed from this Rule; those who occupy the most important offices, as well as those who have care of the least duties, should submit all things to the Prioress. They should do everything with her advice, and not by that of another and without her knowledge. Each one should ascertain if her manner of acting is conformable to the

intentions of the Prioress, and not content herself with a mere supposition or interpretation, often false, which has its source in self-love, always eager to satisfy itself. Let us not forget that we ought to obey *in truth*, and for this we should seek to know *in truth* the wishes of our Prioress, and not interpret them to the gratification of our own intentions, inclinations, views, or personal desires. When we have reason to fear that we are being blinded by self-love, let us repress our eagerness and refrain from acting until we have a perfect knowledge of the Will of God as manifested to us through the Prioress, unless an evident and pressing necessity occurs; and even in this case, we should do so only with a sincere intention of giving her an account of the action as soon as possible, with our motives and reasons for not having deferred it.

Oh! how easily we can delude ourselves, when we interpret the intentions of our Superiors in things which concern us personally! Here again, let us mistrust ourselves, let us mistrust the angel of darkness who, on these occasions, disguises himself as an angel of light, in order to make us act against the wishes of our Superiors.

The Rule directs that *all things be done according to his will and direction*. This dependence extends to all things without any reserve. All that concerns the temporal affairs of the house, in general and in particular, all that relates to the different offices, to the work and to the various occupations of the Sisters; all that concerns the clothing, the nourishment, the furniture, the needs of the Religious, whether sick or well; spiritual things, practices of devotion, of penance, etc., all should be done in this spirit of dependence. The perfect practice of this point of the Rule is a death-blow to self-will.

It is easy to understand that since all things must be done with the advice of the Prioress, no one should dare to infringe upon this right by permitting herself to give advice to any whomsoever, without having received express authority to do so.

In fine, the dependence ordained by the Rule ought to be entire, exact, blind, universal, cheerful, simple, supernatural, humble and joyous. These are the principal qualities which distinguish it from servile dependence, which is rather that of slaves than of true children of God; and it is this dependence, in the spirit

of Religion and of love, which procures true peace of soul and repose in God, in the joy of a good conscience, and of loving confidence in the Divine Goodness.

SECOND POINT.

It is easy to understand the connection which exists between the practice of this point of the Rule and the perfection of the spirit of the Order.

1st. The spirit of penance and mortification cannot but be maintained by our rigorous enclosure and the privation of all communication with the world. The vigilance of the Prioress over all exterior intercourse, permits the Religious to remain ignorant of many things which only serve to nourish self-love. The pleasures of mind and of heart are much more rare since we are deprived of what may procure them, that is, relations with family and friends. The regulations to be observed for the visits and other intercourse with seculars, render all things subjective and mortifying to the "ego". If we join to this that entire and universal dependence which we have just considered above, we shall find much wherewith to nourish within us the spirit of penance and mortification.

2nd. Can we then doubt the efficacy of all the practices of mortification which flow from the observance of this point of the Rule, for acquiring the perfection of the spirit of prayer and of uniting ourselves more easily to God? We can even say, without fear of being mistaken, that it is precisely in order to attain this end that the Rule places us in this necessity of mortifying ourselves, and separates us from so many things capable of distracting us and of nourishing our natural instincts, at the expense of the religious, supernatural and divine life to which we are called.

3rd. When, in a point of our Rule, we have embraced that which is capable of establishing in us a spirit of renunciation and of prayer, we can be assured of seeing very soon increase within us the spirit of zeal for the glory of God; for the supernatural life is maintained by all that the Rule retrenches from the natural life, and the more we live this supernatural life the more we shall have at heart the glory of God. Let us then be faithful ob-

servers of this point of the Rule, and we shall find in it abundant means for acquiring the double spirit which characterizes the child of Carmel.

THIRD POINT

Examples

The Holy Gospel teaches us that our Lord was submissive to those whom His Father had given Him as Superiors; He passed thirty years of His mortal life in dependence upon them. He led a very retired life, having no intercourse with the world, except in cases of absolute necessity. This good Master afterwards being at the head of His Disciples assumed no marks of distinction; He wished to be as poor as they, in His lodgings, in His clothing and in His food; He watched while His Apostles took their rest. He separated them from the world, teaching them that one thing alone is necessary: to love and serve God, and by this means to save our soul; and that those who know how to leave courageously, father, mother, brothers and sisters, will find a hundredfold in this life and eternal glory in the next.

The most holy Virgin separated herself from her family in her tenderest infancy, in order to consecrate herself to the service of God, living retired in the temple, forgetting the world, and seeking only to know and accomplish the Will of God, manifested by those who had authority over her. Later on, she gives us an example of perfect dependence towards St. Joseph, submitting herself to him always with the same docility, the same spirit of faith, the same renouncement of her own judgment, the same humility, and the same love of God.

Our holy Mother St. Teresa understood well and appreciated the advantages of enclosure and separation from the world, she who had left the Mitigation so as to embrace a stricter observance in which intercourse with world was more rare and safeguarded by so many precautions that it was almost impossible for its spirit to penetrate to the interior of the Monastery.

We read in the life of this great Saint that, when she was elected Prioress of the Convent of the Incar-

nation, she found no more efficacious means for re-establishing regular discipline and causing the religious spirit to revive, than a careful guarding of the turns and parlors. She placed in these offices Religious worthy of her confidence, and she made it her duty to reply herself to seculars when she judged it necessary; she thus succeeded in causing the parlors to become almost deserted, and the Religious to taste the happiness of a life of enclosure and solitude. They were so happy themselves at this transformation, that they wished to reelect our holy Mother at the expiration of her term of office, although they had, in the beginning, greatly opposed her, so much did they dread the reforms which they feared should take place under her government. It is then very true that privations and mortifications are only painful to us when we try to fly from them; when we embrace them with courage and generosity, the sweetness attached to them renders their practice easy and agreeable.

Our holy Father St. John of the Cross also left the Mitigation in order to embrace a life more retired, more hidden and more solitary. He did not refuse to hold some intercourse with the world when necessary, but he avoided all useless visits and all relations from which he could not expect any profit for the glory of God; and on this subject we may cite here that example, so well known in his life. The Religious of the Monastery of which he was Prior, earnestly pressed him to return some visits of politeness to certain persons of distinction; he defended himself from their importunities for a long time, thinking that there was no necessity to leave his solitude for such reasons which could procure no edification to these persons, and no glory to God. The Visitor of Andalusia, having come to the Convent, and being made acquainted with the fact, was edified; he greatly praised the perfect regularity of this saintly Religious, but, at the same time, he advised him to satisfy the desires of his Brethren, in regard to the visits in question. Thus directed by obedience, our Saint profited by the Christmas holidays to visit two

of these great personages: he went first to the house of the President of the Council, who lived near the Convent. After having saluted him with all the respect due to his rank, he begged to be excused for having delayed so long to visit him, assuring him that he had not failed to recommend him to God. The President received these excuses kindly, and in order to make him understand how much he appreciated his conduct, he addressed him thus: "Know, my Father, that we are much more edified at seeing you in your own house than in ours. If in ours you entertain us, in your own you edify us. The Religious who lives in solitude raises our heart to God; he who leaves it neither edifies us nor gains the least credit for himself." The holy Prior required no more; he shortened his visit, and taking care not to present himself at the house of the Archbishop, he returned directly to his Convent. "My father," he said, while on the way, to the Religious who accompanied him, "with what confusion has this man covered us! Why could not the entire Order have been there to hear what he has said? They would then understand well how little we gain from these useless visits, which the devil tries to introduce among us under the plea of necessity." After re-entering the Convent and relating to the Community what had taken place, he added: "No one knows better than the people of the world what they themselves expect of us. Now, what they expect to find in us is not courtiers, but Saints. It is not in their houses that they wish to see us, but in our own, occupied in recommending them to God."

He took care often to repeat to his Brethren the lesson which this wise magistrate had given him, and, little by little, he published it in all the Monasteries of the Reform. God has permitted that it should come down to us, so that we might be well persuaded that it is a delusion to believe that communication with seculars is necessary for inducing them to come to the aid of our Monasteries. Let us seek first the Kingdom of Heaven by keeping the Rule faithfully in our solitude, and God Himself will take good care

to inspire them to come to our aid when it is necessary.

The dependence ordered by this point of the Rule, upon which we are meditating, has been at all times faithfully guarded in the Monasteries of our holy Order; and when any of the Religious violated it, a public reparation of the fault was always made. We read that St. Berthold, being Prior, ordered his Procurator to give some pieces of money to a poor man who had asked for alms, but the latter, judging no doubt that the Community was too poor to be deprived of the little money that remained, eluded the command and did not give the money, telling the poor man that he had none. The Saint, having heard of this, ordered that all the money then found in the chest should be immediately thrown into the river. The Religious, having observed to him that it would be a great loss to throw away the money; and that it would be much better to give it to the poor, the Saint maintained his order, saying that this money, sullied by disobedience, was unclean, and could serve to no good purpose. He afterwards gave a severe reprimand to the Procurator, and deprived him of his office.

Another time, the Religious who had care of the bakery, having reserved some bread for the Community instead of giving it to a poor man, according to the order which St. Berthold had given him, the Saint wished to chastise this disobedience in a striking manner. He reproved the poor Religious with great severity, gave him a hard discipline in presence of all the others, and then threw the bread into the river.

It was in the same spirit that St. Benedict caused to be thrown out of the window, a bottle of oil which the Cellarer had refused to give to a poor man under pretext that the Community possessed no more for its own use.

FOURTH POINT

Examen

Have we greatly appreciated the happiness of being separated from the world and from all communion with it, in ignorance of all that is said and done

there? Do we understand the greatness of the grace which God has given us in placing at the door of our Monastery a sentinel who watches and guards the house so that nothing hurtful to our soul may penetrate within it, and that nothing detrimental to the glory of God may go out from it? Do we pray for her who has this charge so that God may give her the spirit of discernment, of prudence, of wisdom, the light, the strength, in a word, all the graces of which she has need in order to acquit herself of this delicate mission according to the Will of God, with profit to ourselves, edification to our neighbor, and the advancement of her own soul which is so exposed?

When we have been obliged to go to the parlor, have we not shown ourselves curious, light, unfaithful to regular observance? Have we not desired these visits, seeking to procure them under pretext that they were for the good of souls, while in reality it was only to gratify our curiosity? Have we not spoken uselessly and imprudently of what was passing in the Monastery, giving information to persons of the world concerning things of which they ought to be ignorant, and the knowledge of which could only give them an occasion to judge the Order in an unfavorable manner, and to speak ill of it? Oh, how reserved and prudent should be the tongue of a Religious! For otherwise, should we not be responsible for the false ideas conceived of Religious by many seculars, and the contempt which they sometimes feel for what is most holy in the Church?

Let us bless God a thousand times for having placed us in a position where it is almost impossible to communicate with the world, from which we have fled in order to find God in solitude; and Who, to prevent the effects of our inconstancy and weakness, subjects us to so many regulations which oblige us to remain faithful to our determination of dying to the world.

Chapter III of our holy Constitutions gives us instructions which serve to develop this point of the Rule, and which will aid us to make the examen of the faults which we have committed against it, and

thus discover if we have lived according to the spirit of our holy Rule.

Since we should see no one unveiled except our father, mother, etc., are we permitted to try to look through the veil, or through any opening leading to the exterior? We know how our holy Mother St. Teresa severely punished a Religious who had looked through the crack of a door, and another who went to a window of the cloister to see her pass when she was entering the Monastery. Are we permitted to ask questions in order to know what we cannot see ourselves? Is it permitted to supply by the imagination what the grates hide from our view?

Let us here sigh over the inconstancy of our frail nature, while witnessing the inconsistency of our conduct. We have buried ourselves voluntarily in this profound solitude, behind these enclosure walls, after having sighed and wept, perhaps for years, in order to obtain this great grace of no longer seeing or hearing anything of the perverse world; and now, when this happiness has been granted us and we find ourselves entirely separated from the world, we have recourse to a thousand ingenuities in order to look at it through some little opening and transport ourselves there again, at least in thought!

Our holy Constitutions prescribe that we should not go to the parlor without a companion. Have we not shown some repugnance for the Sister who has been appointed to fulfill this office, and have we not asked for another more to our liking? Have we not made use of words of double meaning in order not to be understood by the companion?

Have we entirely discharged upon the Prioress all that concerns our relations with the outside world, as to business, visits, and letters? Have we left to her the care of directing all things within the Convent according to our holy Rule? Have we not contradicted, blamed, or criticised what she had decided upon, advised, or ordered? Have we not infringed upon her rights by interfering in affairs which did not be-

long to us, giving our advice, deciding or directing things to be done without having received any authority for this?

Have we not withdrawn ourselves from obedience by neglecting to do things ordered to be done in common, under pretext that the order had not been given to us personally and formally, although we well knew the intentions of the Prioress? Have we not interpreted her words and intentions in order to do things according to our own views and to follow our own tastes and natural eagerness; also, in regards to our health, persuading ourselves, against our conscience, that we ought to take better care of it, and treat ourselves in such or such a way, without first assuring ourselves of the real wishes of our Prioress?

Have we seen only God and His Will in the directions which have been given us, either concerning spiritual things, or those which are exterior and temporal? Can we say in truth that we have done all things according to the advice and direction of the Prioress? Has our dependence been entire and without reserve? How many times have we not had only the outward form of dependence, and retrenched from it the little details which should have adorned it if we had not been wanting in generosity in renouncing our own will in those things which appeared to us of little importance? Has our dependence been universal, extending to all things?

Alas! does not our conscience reproach us with a crowd of little actions which have not received the blessing of obedience? So many little arrangements in our cells, in our offices, in our food, in our clothing and in our work; so many little conversations out of time and without permission: all this has been done only by a movement of our own will. The fear that these actions would not receive the desired approbation, has not this been the motive of withdrawing them from obedience? Has our dependence been blind when we questioned the orders and advice of our Prioress? Have we submitted our thoughts and our practices of devotion to her with simplicity? Whence comes it that we spend hours, days perhaps,

calculating how to represent things in such a way that the Prioress may accept them favorably, and thus that her will may accord with our own? Do we live joyously and with a good heart in the practice of dependence when, in the presence of an action prescribed by obedience, our features assume an air of sadness and of weariness, our hearts contract, and we accomplish it through force and with a bad grace?

Are we humble in our dependence, when self-love presents us with a thousand reasons to prove that what we have been made to do should have succeeded much better if it had been executed in a different manner? Are we humble in our dependence when we hold to certain little points of honor, showing a difficulty to obey an official whose capacity we believe to be inferior to our own? In fine, is our dependence supernatural, seeing only the Will of God in that of the Prioress?

Oh! if this were only the case, then there would be no more discontent, no more complaints, no more murmuring, either against the least orders of the Prioress, or against the officials; whatever they might do, or in what ever manner it might be done, it is God Who conducts all things in His infinite Wisdom and immense Love. Oh then, what joy, what peace, in religious dependence!

CHAPTER FOURTH—(Continued.)

THIRD MEDITATION.

Text: *Each one shall remain in his cell or near it, meditating day and night on the law of the Lord, and watching in prayer, unless he be otherwise justly employed.*

FIRST POINT.

It is principally here that we find contained the exercises of the ascetic life in solitude. We discover first, in the terms of the Rule, the necessity and obligation of the solitary life. *Each one shall remain in his cell.* In the second place, we find indicated the occupation to which we ought to apply ourselves in solitude: *Meditating day and night.* Thirdly, the Rule points out the occupations which may momentarily necessitate an interruption of the exercises of the soul in solitude: *Unless they be otherwise justly employed.* Let us try to develop these considerations which are of such great importance for our advancement in the perfection of our holy vocation.

1st. Reason alone tells us that the levity of our mind and the weakness of our will necessitate solitude, so as to be able to treat seriously and with calmness any affair whatsoever; with greater reason is it necessary for the one essential affair, that of sanctity. If a man of letters retires into his study in order to occupy himself with science; a lawyer, to study thoroughly some important case; if the merchant wishes to be alone to regulate his accounts; if the philosopher, in search of happiness and wisdom, separates himself from the world, can we entertain the idea that solitude is not necessary for acquiring the science of the Saints, a knowledge of God and of ourselves, to study the truths of faith, to treat seriously the great affair of our eternal destiny, to regulate the accounts of our conscience, to seek after true wisdom, and to take the means of securing for ourselves real and solid happiness? The thing is too evident to necessitate any further reflections on this point.

2nd. Faith teaches us that the greatest works of God have been and are ever done in solitude; that the great mysteries of our holy Religion have been conceived in the eternal solitude of God, and carried out, for the most part,

in solitude. It points out in the Holy Scriptures the invitation and promises of the Holy Spirit, to make us appreciate and seek after solitude. In one place, we read that it is God who leads the soul into solitude, there to speak to her heart; elsewhere, we learn that in solitude He will give to the soul perfect peace, and will elevate her not only above all creatures, but, much higher still, above herself, in the region of pure love. What can be more capable of attracting us to solitude?

3rd. In fine, love makes solitude a law for us, a law more binding than that of the Rule itself, and attracts us to solitude and establishes us there, notwithstanding all that could oppose it, either within or without us. Where is the heart burning with love that does not seek solitude in order to occupy itself with the object beloved? Our desire for solitude is in direct proportion to the degree of our love of God. Let us then love God Who has first loved us, Who has created us for Himself and has chosen us from all eternity to unite us to Himself; let us love Him, and we shall have need of no other Rule to keep our solitude.

But what should we do in solitude? It is very important to have definite ideas upon this point, for the cell is the place where a child of Carmel is to sanctify herself. The Rule wishes that we should remain in a separate cell, not as prisoners nor convicts, not as misanthropists who live separated from others only through force, or from some extravagant whim. The Rule does not wish us to remain there alone with ourselves, occupied with our own petty interests. True solitude, in withdrawing us from intercourse with creatures, places us in the society of God, and obliges us, in consequence, to occupy ourselves with Him; this is what our Rule means by *meditating day and night on the law of the Lord, and watching in prayer*. The occupations of the cell are reduced to three principal ones, which we find expressed in this point of the Rule: continual meditation; watching without relaxation; prayer and union with God.

The cell, then, can be considered: 1st. As a school where the soul studies and is instructed; 2nd. A strong fortress where she watches; 3rd. A temple where she prays and immolates herself.

First, the cell is a school where the Holy Spirit in-

structs and enlightens our soul. It is there we learn to know God, His perfections, His works and His law, by the reading and the meditation of the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Gospel, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles, the Lives of the Saints, and above all, the Crucifix which is the book by excellence, from which doctors the most holy have drawn their science and their sanctity. There again, we study at the school of the Holy Spirit how to know ourselves, to discover our weaknesses, our defects and passions, a knowledge from which humility, that essential basis of true sanctity, proceeds. It is in the cell that we learn to despise the world and its maxims, to appreciate creatures at their just value, and to make use of them only within the limits of the Will of God. In fine, it is at this school that our soul, if faithful to all these practices, fortifies itself and advances day by day in the science of the Saints.

Secondly, the cell is a strong fortress, where our soul is in security only in as far as it watches day and night over all the passages, preventing attacks, preparing its means of defense, calculating its losses, discovering the breaches and repairing them, taking, in fine, proper measures not to be surprised by its numberless enemies, whether they attack it openly, or employ snares and artifices. This is what the Rule intends when it says: *Meditating day and night . . . and watching*. It is only at the price of this continual vigilance, and by a combat almost incessant, that the soul finds in her cell peace and repose; for as long as we remain here below we shall have enemies to combat; and while we may shelter ourselves from the world and the demons, we cannot hide from self, that enemy who in itself is more terrible and more dangerous than all hell together, because no power can prevail against us unless we choose to range ourselves on its side.

Let us then watch over our senses which are the doors by which death enters the soul. Let us watch in order to overcome nature, always so exacting. Let us watch over the imagination, always inclined to wander if we do not check it. Let us watch over our memory, to empty it of all evil or useless remembrances, and to fill it with that knowledge profitable to our spiritual advancement. Let us watch over our understanding, to prevent it from en-

gaging itself in matters unworthy of its nobility. But, above all, let us watch over our heart, that no created object may take possession of it and occupy it at the expense of the rights of God, Who alone should possess it in peace.

Let us remark that this continual vigilance ought to be exercised particularly over our weakest point, because the devil prowls unceasingly around us in order to discover it and surprise us there. It is necessary then to search for this predominant defect, and labor to correct it by a particular examen seriously made and continued with perseverance.

But as it is in vain to place sentinels around the city, if God does not keep it, we must join prayer to vigilance; and this is why the Rule says: *Watching in prayer*. Thus, while we watch by examens, by mortification, by renunciation, our heart should be raised unceasingly to God to ask His aid, without which our vigilance would be powerless. If at times God should judge proper to raise our soul to a supernatural state of prayer, our own activity would then be harmful; but as these favors are not necessary and as it does not depend upon ourselves to procure them, nor should we even desire them, we shall limit ourselves to saying that if God should so honor us, we ought to receive them with fear and confusion and not stop at, and much less, attach ourselves to them. The doctrine of our holy Father St. John of the Cross is very clear, very precise, and very capable of giving us correct ideas upon this subject.

Thirdly, we have said that the cell is also a temple where the soul retires in order to give itself up to the exercises of love by immolating itself entirely upon the altar of the good pleasure of God. A temple is a place specially consecrated to God, where we go to pray, to adore Him and to offer Him sacrifices. There, great silence should reign, all should incline us to recollection. There, we should render Him adoration and homage as to our Creator, our Sovereign Lord and our Last End. There, we should testify to Him our love with outpourings of the heart, according to circumstances and the needs of our soul. There, we should render Him thanksgiving for His innumerable benefits, praise His adorable and infinite perfections, and contemplate His works and the

marvels of His Power, of His Wisdom and of His Mercy. We should rejoice that He alone is great and infinitely perfect, and that He alone merits the honor, the praise and the love of all creatures, and unite ourselves to the whole Heavenly Court to praise and to glorify Him.

God is not content that we should render Him homage only, He wishes us to ask Him for His graces in order to satisfy the great desire He has of granting them to us. The Holy Spirit says: "I hear the desires which I have inspired." It is God Himself Who inspires the solitary soul with the petitions which please Him most and which He hears most willingly, namely: the grace of sanctification for ourselves and for our neighbor, the triumph of Holy Church, the pressing needs of souls in general, and, in particular, of those who have been recommended to us, or in whom we are especially interested.

In order to give more efficacy to these two exercises of adoration and of petition, we should join thereto that of sacrifice. Now, what victim should we immolate? God no longer wishes the blood of goats and of bulls; He wishes for our heart, He desires the immolation of our entire being.

This immolation is made by the continual practice of mortification of the senses, by the occasions of pain and suffering which are met with in the cell, by the interior renunciation of all consolations and natural enjoyments of the mind and heart, of which the soul is deprived in solitude; and particularly, by the complete sacrifice of our own will. This immolation ought to be entire, and united to that of our Lord from which it derives all its merit; and, as it is voluntary, generosity and love ought to enhance its value.

Fidelity to remain in our cell will teach us by experience that it is not only a school, a strong fortress, a temple, but also an anticipated paradise, where our soul, united to its only Good, has but one movement: that of love; one sole desire, one sole ambition, one only happiness: to glorify God and see His holy Will accomplished in all things.

Let us then obey this point of the Rule with all the exactitude and all the generosity of which we are capable. *Otherwise justly employed*, as in acts of Community, whatever they may be, the offices and duties in which obedience may employ us, works of charity, all these can

make us leave our cell; but nothing can oblige us to leave our little interior solitude. With the exception of the above cases, we should remain in our cell for the reasons which we have amply explained while meditating upon Chapter III of our holy Rule.

SECOND POINT.

The spirit of penance and of mortification is continually exercised in the life of the cell, because meditation, vigilance, prayer and immolation in no way favor sensuality; this life, on the contrary, condemns our senses, our body, our faculties, in a word, our whole being, to the most exact and the most constant interior and exterior renunciation. Our nature is so ingenious that, if we do not watch it closely, it will make us consider merely natural satisfactions as a *just cause* for leaving the cell! How easily our mind wanders in search of created objects, and our memory takes such complacency in useless remembrances, instead of *meditating on the law of the Lord!*

In proportion as the soul purifies itself by the regular exercises of the life of the cell, by reading, by good thoughts, and by the infusion of the graces of the Holy Spirit, it becomes more capable of uniting itself to God, and of receiving more frequently His divine communications. Retired particularly in her interior solitude, which becomes a sanctuary where God resides in a special manner, this soul unites herself to Him in a still more intimate and permanent way, and the acts which her heart produces become more and more pure and simple. It is there that is enkindled within her the zeal which we ought to have for the interests of the Divine Majesty and the good of souls. It is there that, considering the torrent of iniquity which inundates the world, she offers herself to God in quality of victim, uniting herself to our Lord in order to appease the wrath of His Heavenly Father and to draw down His mercy upon the world.

Who can unveil what passes between God and the soul in this intimate sanctuary? Who can tell how many heroic acts of devotedness come forth from a heart thus given to God, and how many graces He grants to it?

THIRD POINT

Examples

As we have already considered, our Divine Master

is our model in the practice of this point of our Rule. The greater part of His life was passed in solitude, which He left, not to satisfy a natural inclination, but only to accomplish the Will of His Father. Jesus, solitary in the bosom of Mary, solitary at Nazareth, in Egypt, in the desert, in the Garden of Olives, does not, however, remain idle; His Heart is in a continual state of immolation; it consumes itself in ardent desires for the glory of His Father and to satisfy for our sins.

The divine Mary in solitude meditated in her heart upon the graces and the wonderful works of God.

It was in her cell that our holy Mother St. Teresa received from the Holy Spirit those solid lessons which she has transmitted to us in order to lead us to the highest perfection. If she had not loved her solitude and remained there according to the spirit of the Rule, would she have become one of the most brilliant lights of the Church? Was it not in solitude that the Seraph transpierced her heart with a dart which carried the flames of pure love even to her very entrails? It was while meditating in solitude upon the law of God, at the school of the Holy Spirit, that our holy Mother comprehended so well the meaning of the Rule of Carmel and found the means necessary for reviving this Rule in all its perfection and primitive spirit. It was while watching in solitude that she recognized, combatted and corrected whatever in her conduct could displease God, and fortified her soul against all the difficulties with which she might meet; it was in this temple that she offered herself to God, a thousand times, in quality of victim, for His glory and the good of souls.

Our holy Father St John of the Cross, that worthy emulator of our Seraphic Mother in the solitary life, has enclosed in one maxim the exercises of that life: "To suffer, to work, and to be silent." To suffer in solitude physical inconveniences and interior pains; labor of the body, the mind and the heart by continual vigilance, flying at all times idleness, laziness and sloth; silence with creatures and with oneself in order to listen to God and to speak to Him.

FOURTH POINT

Examen

Have we occupied ourselves in our cell *meditating on the law of God*? Have we made our spiritual reading with attention? Have we occupied our mind with good thoughts, such as a remembrance of our morning prayer and Holy Communion? Have we drawn from our lecture, our Rule, and the Holy Scripture, practical conclusions to correct our defects and acquire virtue? Do we dispose ourselves night and day for an occupation so holy? Considering the cell as a temple where we should adore God, pray and immolate ourselves, have we been faithful to the spirit of prayer and immolation, when, instead of combatting our natural inclinations, we have sought to satisfy them; when we have permitted our senses to see, to hear, to touch, to taste, and to feel all that could flatter them; when we have occupied our mind with vain or sad reflections about some agreeable or disagreeable event which had flattered or wounded our self-love; when we occupied our heart with objects or remembrances which awaken the passions? At such times, have we sought to examine ourselves in order to correct these movements and direct them towards God?

Have we been faithful to the spirit of prayer and immolation, when we have sought for means of avoiding a humiliation, a contradiction, an act of renunciation; when we have cast our eyes upon our neighbor in order to judge her, given ourselves up to a thousand comments detrimental to charity and humility; when we have reasoned upon the words or conduct of our Superiors? Have we been faithful to the spirit of prayer and immolation, when we have listened to the devil in his efforts to make us alter our conduct, showing us in beautiful colors what is only untrue and sinful, and who insinuates to us, under a pretext of necessity, numberless little seekings after our own ease? And, perhaps, how much time lost in studying these pretended corporal needs, as also the means to procure reliefs, either directly, or by ways contrary to simplicity!

Is this the life of continual immolation by which to honor God, to express our love for Him, and to implore His mercy upon ourselves and upon sinners? While giving such liberty to our faculties and to our self-love, can we flatter ourselves that we have been vigilant in our cell to prevent the attacks of our enemies? Have we not rather invited them there, in furnishing them with arms against ourselves? It is not the walls of the cell which procure for us the advantages and happiness to be found therein, but rather the occupations in which we employ ourselves. Have we not experienced that, without work, without vigilance, without the spirit of prayer and immolation, the cell becomes, so to speak, a den for all the vices which idleness brings forth?

In witnessing our defeats, notwithstanding our resolutions, our plans of attack and of defense, have we not allowed ourselves to be cast down? Should we not have avoided many falls if our vigilance had been sustained by prayer? We should then have experienced that God is the strength of those who invoke Him with humility and confidence. Let us, then, watch and pray. Watch, for the moment when we sleep is the one in which we are attacked and overcome. Pray, because of ourselves we are powerless in the work of our sanctification.

Have we not sought our cell rather through a natural attraction, than to work and suffer there for the love of God? Have we not neglected to fulfill the duties of our office, because we did not overcome this natural inclination, forgetting that obedience is preferable to repose? By a contrary defect, have we not too easily left our solitude, without being obliged to do so on account of being *otherwise justly employed*? Have we been faithful to retire into the sanctuary of our heart, that our soul might not lose its interior recollection in the midst of our exterior occupations?

Have we returned with pleasure to our cell after some just employment had withdrawn us from it; and have we then been vigilant to repair the breaches

which, perhaps, had been made in our spiritual edifice?

What subjects for confusion do we not find in going through all the points of this examen! If this sight confounds us, it should not discourage us. Let us thank God for the lights which He has given us; let us remember that He never refuses pardon to a humble and contrite heart, and let us take in His Presence a generous resolution to remain in solitude, when obedience or charity does not call us elsewhere, there to occupy ourselves with the holy exercises prescribed by our Rule. Let us seek nothing outside of the good pleasure of God, uniting ourselves unceasingly to His adorable Will; it is by this exercise of love that the destruction of self is consummated, and by it we attain the end which God proposed to Himself in calling us to Carmel.

CHAPTER FOURTH—(Continued)

FOURTH MEDITATION.

Text: *Meditating day and night, and watching in prayer.*

FIRST POINT.

These few words of our holy Rule are too important not to be made the subject of a special meditation. We do not, however, intend to treat of the different methods of prayer and meditation, nor of the divers states of prayer through which God causes souls to pass; there exist enough good books which treat these matters thoroughly and to which we may have recourse to inform ourselves of what the holy Fathers and the Masters of the spiritual life teach on this subject. We shall then limit ourselves in this Meditation to consider mental prayer under a few points capable of making us appreciate it and practise it with more assiduity, for the greater glory of God, our own interest, and the good of souls. All the perfection of our vocation depends upon the manner in which we meditate and in which we pray: it is by the union of these two exercises that we discover the “way” and find the means and strength to walk in it securely and constantly.

Meditation enlightens the understanding: prayer strengthens the will. Meditation leads us to God: prayer unites us to Him. Meditation makes known to us His Divine Will: prayer enables us to accomplish it with love and generosity. Thus, we should never, of ourselves, separate these two exercises which mutually aid and sustain each other, and which our holy Rule itself does not separate, since it tells us to *meditate day and night* and *watch in prayer*. Entering into this spirit, we shall comprehend both under the single term *Prayer*, in the few reflections we are about to make, leaving aside what concerns supernatural states which are entirely beyond our free and voluntary operation. Souls who are called thereto will find in a good direction, conformable to the doctrine of our holy Mother St. Teresa and our holy Father St. John of the Cross, as also in obedience, the light and instructions necessary not to go astray in states so extraordinary and so subject to illusion. As for us,

let us occupy ourselves seriously in practising this point of our Rule.

Meditating day and night. The Rule here teaches us that it is the Will of God that we live in continual prayer. How should we do this, and why? In the first place, we should, at certain hours, meditate with order and method upon the truths and mysteries of our Holy Religion, and then, at all hours, at all times,—besides the good thoughts with which the Rule directs that we should fortify our minds—we ought to have our heart united in will and affection to God, always disposed to do His holy Will, always in an exercise of love, in exterior occupations as well as in those of religion; this habitual disposition of the will is what we call continual prayer.

But why should we always be in prayer? Let us first lay down a principle, the consequences of which will throw a little light upon this question. God alone is our All: we find in Him our life, our light, and the remedy for all our evils.

I. God is the life of our soul: “I am the life,” says the Eternal Truth: without this life our soul is only as a corpse which causes horror.

II. God is the light which enlightens our soul in its operations: “I am the light,” He says to us: “He who follows Me walks not in darkness.” Without it our soul can only go astray and lose itself.

III. God is the health and the salvation of our soul: “I have not come for those who are well,” again says our Lord, “but for those who are sick. Come to me and I will cure you.” Without Him our soul faints and dies.

We have continual need of this life, this light and this health, which we can find only in God; because as poor children of Adam, our soul is continually in the midst of darkness and upon the border of the abyss, subject to death and to all sorts of spiritual infirmities, the germs of which are in it since the moment it first animated the body.

Now, it is by prayer employed as food, as light and as a remedy, that our soul can live of God.

I. God is the life of our soul: prayer is its nourishment. The principal effects of good nourishment are: to maintain life, to cause growth and development, and to give strength; but in order to operate these happy effects,

in the supernatural order as in the natural, four conditions are essential: the choice of nourishment, its preparation, its manducation and its digestion.

1st. THE CHOICE. Among the great many kinds of food of which man can make use to maintain his life, there are some which suit him more specially, some others which are not good for his constitution, and others, in fine, which are salutary or injurious according to the seasons, the different climates, or his actual state of health. All this can be applied to the spiritual life. For souls also there are seasons, climates, and particular conditions; so that, among the great number of subjects for prayer which are offered us, we should choose those which correspond to our present needs. This choice should not be made through caprice, but by the inspiration of the Spirit of God, conformable to the direction of those who hold His place in our regard, with discernment, and without seeking anything else than the greater glory of God and the true and solid good of our soul. It sometimes happens that this choice is made by a particular inspiration and by a manifest impulse of grace which we should not resist. The great truths of salvation nourish our soul at certain times, while at other times they will be less profitable, perhaps, even hurtful.

The mysteries of our Lord, His examples and His maxims, are subjects of prayer which habitually suit us: but there are times when it is more advantageous to choose from among them, some rather than others. Sometimes our soul will nourish itself with profit by some passages from the Holy Scripture, or the examples of the Saints; at other times it will be more salutary for us to meditate upon the virtues of humility, of charity, and of obedience. According to times and circumstances, it will be well also to contemplate the perfections of God in order to nourish our soul with admiration, love and confidence; to consider His works, His conduct in our regard, His Goodness, His Mercy, in contrast to our malice and ingratitude. Let us then always choose those subjects which can be most useful to us and which will produce the best effects.

It is well to remark that the productions of each season are generally those which are most suitable for our body; it is also well, generally to choose for our soul subjects

which relate to the mysteries and feasts which are being celebrated by the Church.

2nd. THE PREPARATION. We should prepare the subject chosen, following the rules traced out by the Masters of the spiritual life, and dividing it into several points. We must prepare our soul to receive this nourishment, in such a way that it be empty of creatures and of ourselves, and may hunger and thirst after justice. Recollection, humility and good-will assure the success of prayer.

3rd. MANDUCATION. Food once prepared must be divided and masticated, piece by piece: this is what the reflections and the considerations of the understanding operate upon the points of prayer, not passing from one to another without having sufficiently developed each.

4th. DIGESTION. In order that food may be well digested, it must find life, heat, and organs well regulated in their functions. In the same way, in order that prayer may be profitable, our soul should be empty of all created things, empty of the "ego" which, like a predominant and malignant humor, spoils all that is good in us. We must have in our soul the warmth of good-will and generosity in order to facilitate the digestion of certain truths which are repugnant to nature and self-love. Lastly, all our interior movements should be well ordered and tend forcibly towards good for God's glory alone.

It is thus that the life of God is maintained within our soul, that it is developed and fortified. The necessities of life, exterior occupations, indispensable relations which we must have with creatures, cause us to expend each day something from our spiritual life. Prayer repairs this loss and supplies this daily deficiency.

In the designs of God, every living creature is under the obligation of developing until it has attained the perfection which God proposed to Himself in creating it. Thus, our soul should increase and grow in grace and wisdom after the example of the holy Child Jesus. Now, it is from prayer that we draw the love of God and of His Will, which is the nutritious food proper to effect this growth.

The Religious life is, more than any other, a militant life; if the Holy Scriptures did not teach us this, our own experience would suffice to make us recognize it.

Strength, then, is necessary to bear arms, to be on duty unceasingly, and to sustain the fatigues of war, either upon the field of battle, or in camp, whether to make an attack, or to defend ourselves; it is from prayer that we draw the strength necessary to sustain valiantly and with perseverance the battles of the Lord. Whence it follows that prayer should be the continual nourishment of our soul, so as to maintain, augment, and fortify the life of God within us by annihilating the "old man", repressing our evil inclinations, correcting our defects, and triumphing over our passions.

II. God is our light; prayer our torch. That light is necessary to enlighten our steps and our actions, no one can doubt. It is the same in the spiritual life: what can we do without the light of God, "that true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world"? On the one side, all is mysterious and hidden in the spiritual life; on the other, our soul, since the fall, is itself but darkness. This torch of prayer dissipates the darkness; it unveils to us the hidden secrets of the interior life, it shows us the way of perfection, and also the obstacles we must surmount and the means we must take to walk in it with security. By its light we learn to know the malice of sin, and to what a point it has degraded our soul; prayer reveals to us our defects, our inclinations, our passions, and the disorder which they cause in our soul, and suggests to us means for combatting them.

Prayer shows us the charms of virtue in itself, in our Lord, and in the Saints who have practised it; it gives us a glimpse of the beauty of a soul in the state of grace and united to God; it makes us discover and appreciate the value of what is called "cross", "renunciation", "humiliation". By prayer, the eyes of our soul read, so to say, in those of God, even to His least desires; we understand what in us displeases Him, and the imperfections which should disappear to give place to the virtues He asks us to practise. By prayer, souls raise themselves to the highest contemplation of the works and perfections of God, penetrate, so to speak, even into His Heart, where marvelous secrets are unveiled before them.

It is also by the light of the divine torch that we discover the illusions of the spirit of darkness and those, yet more disguised, of self-love. But, again, that this

torch may enlighten us, it is necessary to draw from the flintstone the spark which is to light it; this is done by the labor of meditation. Let us keep our lamp in hand, bringing to prayer great uprightness and simplicity, and examining in its light each of our actions. Let vigilance over ourselves be the oil which sustains this light, so that no breath of ill-regulated passion, of self-love or vanity, might extinguish it or, throwing dust into our eyes, blind us, and make it impossible for us to follow it. We may then conclude that, with these four conditions, prayer will be for us a saving torch; unless, at once, and without any labor on our part, God wishes to place before us, as He did formerly for the Israelites in the desert, a luminous column which will show us the way; but this prayer being supernatural, we should not depend upon it. Let us occupy ourselves earnestly in doing what is in our power to become enlightened, as our holy Rule intends in these words: *meditating day and night, and watching in prayer.*

Let us remark, however, that generally speaking, we cannot by our own labor, obtain here below a great abundance of light; that which is given to us in prayer is not of a kind capable of producing natural joy. It is a light of truth, and truth concerning ourselves is not of a nature to flatter self-love. It is a light which conducts to eternal truth by making us pass through a darkness terrifying to nature. It is the small lamp of the wise virgin, which suffices to guide her steps towards the nuptial chamber of her Spouse, and enlightens her while she awaits the opening of the door. It is a light of faith, which is but darkness to our natural sight; it is like the cloud which guided the people of God in the desert.

The cloud of a prayer which is made in darkness preserves us from the snares of self-love, from presumption and vain glory, and conducts us to God by the way of renunciation, self-abnegation and humility. It is thus that true light shines in the darkness, and the darkness becomes true light. But very often we are not willing to understand this, and we allow that light which procures no sensible consolation, to be extinguished through discouragement; or we extinguish it ourselves by surrendering to the agitation, trouble and inquietude arising from our self-love, which recognizes as light only what shines

with great brilliancy, and which will not accommodate itself to an experimental view of our own nothingness, incapacity and malice.

III. God is our health; prayer is a remedy. Good health is one of the blessings of life which we appreciate above all others; it is the first thing about which we inquire when visiting one another, and it is that which we mutually wish each other when we separate. What do we not do to preserve this blessing, or to recover it when it has been lost! What precautions, what sacrifices! But is not the health of the soul more precious? If we consider it as the reign of God within us, what should we not do to preserve or to recover it? Yes, a soul is in health when God reigns there, for then all its movements are well regulated, all the bad humors of its passions and natural instincts are repressed; each one of its faculties is exercised according to the designs of God. Seated in our soul upon His throne, which is our heart, He governs all within us; from there, divine love spreads its influence over all the powers of our soul, and causes them to act with efficacy for the glory of Him alone Who gives them movement. But, alas! since sin has dethroned our Lord and driven Him from our soul, this good health is very difficult to obtain and preserve; our soul has become subject to a great number of infirmities, the germs of which it always bears within itself, and against which we must protect ourselves as far as possible, by the remedies which God, in His mercy, has placed at our disposal. Now, the most excellent of these remedies, that from which all others draw their virtue, is prayer; for, by it, God, Who is the true health of the soul, communicates Himself to, takes possession of, and governs her. I know well that the Sacraments, practices of penance and good works, are means for establishing the reign of God within us; but I ask, where is their efficacy if they be not accompanied by prayer? Besides, it can happen that there is a real impossibility of approaching the Sacraments, or of performing other good works; it is not thus with prayer; for, even supposing that we have neither the time nor the strength to meditate or make a methodical prayer, it will always be possible, through our will, to have a heart united to God.

Let us then have recourse to this remedy, one which

is always accessible and applicable to all our needs; let us make use of it with discernment, conformably to the advice and direction of our spiritual physicians, and following what our own experience shall have taught us. Let us make our prayer with care, exactitude, good will and courage, at the hours prescribed; let us make it with love, confidence and perseverance in the midst of our daily occupations, tribulations and temptations, and God will be the health of our soul. But if we are negligent and indolent, a great many evils will befall us. The fever and irritation of bad, irregular passions, the revolts of self-love and of the "ego", a disgust for the things of God and the torpid state of all our faculties, will render us incapable of attaining the end of our vocation.

If we are laboring under any one of those evils which we have just pointed out, and which are caused by pride, let us meditate upon the humiliations of our Lord, upon His abnegation, and upon the necessity of walking in His footsteps; for, the servant should not be better treated than the Master, and the bride should share the lot of her Spouse. Efficacious resolutions will flow from these considerations; let us put them in practice with courage, however painful they may be to nature. Let us not judge of the effects produced by the remedy prescribed for such a malady of our soul, for appearances are often deceptive; let us leave this care to those who direct us; let us be docile to their advice, and our prayer, being well directed, will produce that good health and spiritual vigor which proceeds from the reign of Charity within us.

SECOND POINT

From the considerations which we have just made in the first point of this exercise, it will be easy to conclude that the continual prayer ordained by our holy Rule, is an infallible means of acquiring the perfection of our holy vocation.

The life of God in us destroys, by the practice of penance and mortification, the reign of the "old man." The light of God, while enlightening our path, causes us to renounce all that is not according to God, and strengthens us in this spirit of penance and mortification. The reign of God subdues our passions and our will to an entire self-abnegation, whence results a continual and intimate union with God and a great

zeal for His glory and the good of souls. For, when God is once made master of our heart, He governs all the powers of our soul and directs all its operations, conformably to His designs and for His greater glory. Our union with Him makes us will what He wills, seek what He seeks; and our will, thus united to His, co-operates in all His works for the end He proposes to Himself.

Prayer used as nourishment, while making us live of God, powerfully aids us to sacrifice ourselves for the good of souls. Employed as a torch, it reveals to us how jealous God is of His glory and the salvation of souls, what He has done and is continually doing for this end, and what He wishes us to do in union with Him. Taken as a remedy, it communicates to us the vigor needed for dethroning the "ego" and allowing God to reign alone in our heart, in such a way that He can employ us as He wishes in His army, to go forth to the conquest of souls, passing through the way of sufferings and humiliations according as it is necessary for the attainment of those results which are so glorious for His Divine Majesty.

THIRD POINT

Examples

Our Divine Master, seated near the well of Jacob, there to convert the Samaritan woman, being pressed by His Disciples to take the food which they had just brought, told them that He had a nourishment of which they knew nothing. "My meat," added He, "is to do the Will of My Father." Such also is the fruit which our prayer should produce.

Again, we learn of our Lord that before accomplishing an important action, He consulted His Father in prayer, so as to act in all things according to His Will. Had He a miracle to perform? He first raised His eyes and heart to heaven, then ordered the demon or the disease to depart. Was He tempted, or in a cruel agony? Prayer was His strength, His light and His remedy. He prayed everywhere, at all times, in all circumstances, and it is what He taught us on this subject by these words: "Pray without ceasing." He preached by His example. Notwithstanding this

continual prayer, He also had times more especially set apart for this exercise; and we have from Him the most beautiful formula which could possibly be composed, as also the method to follow for rendering our prayer efficacious. "When you pray," said He, "enter into your chamber, close the door, and say: Our Father, Who art in heaven," We see here how we should prepare ourselves for prayer: by recollection, and separation from all created things; placing ourselves in the presence of God in the interior solitude of our heart, and considering Him as our Father; then, asking Him first, for what concerns His glory, and afterwards, for our own needs, particularly sanctity and the accomplishment of His holy Will.

The most holy Virgin spoke very little of the graces with which she was filled, and of the marvelous works of God which had been operated within her; but she meditated in her heart upon all that she saw, heard and understood of the things of God. Mary meditated day and night; she watched in prayer, and the Most High spoke to her through the ministry of an Archangel; the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity descended into her bosom, and she became the co-adjutrix of the Work of works, the Redemption of the human race. It was from prayer that she drew that profound and sincere humility which made her say that she was the humble and submissive servant of the Lord, at the sublime moment in which she became His Mother, teaching us by her example how we should receive supernatural favors when God judges proper to communicate them to us, and the effects they should produce in us. Like the most holy Virgin, let us humble ourselves in proportion as God seems to wish to exalt us; and, while consenting to His operations, let us recognize our own unworthiness.

It was from habitual prayer that Mary drew that blind and prompt obedience which forbade the least reasoning or delay. There she strengthened herself to support that anguish of heart which had been predicted to her by the holy old man Simeon and which made of her the Queen of Martyrs. It was prayer which sustained her when standing at the foot of the Cross, and made her accept as her children those very

ones who were the cause of the death of her Divine Son. What a prayer is this which makes one forget oneself with all that one holds most dear, to see and to will only what God wills, and that, at our own expense, and in circumstances so crucifying to nature!

Our holy Mother Teresa, mistress and model in the practice of mental prayer, tells us that, for neglecting this holy exercise during a year, she incurred great danger of going astray and of being lost. From her writings we learn that, at the time of prayer, she often found herself in a state of great dryness; however, without becoming discouraged, she never ceased to labor, and with much effort she drew from the depth of the well, the little water which was in it; sometimes even, God was content with her good will alone, and all her efforts remained fruitless. This great mistress of contemplation was an enemy to idleness and self-seeking in prayer. When God wished to operate alone in her soul, she allowed Him to do so; but she was faithful to act and to labor when her Divine Master left her the liberty. She has said that the one who makes the best prayer is not she who passes the greater part of the time therein in the midst of consolations and lights, but rather she who best accomplishes the Will of God in a spirit of love; for this is the result and the end of a good prayer.

We read in the life of our Blessed Sister Mary of the Incarnation that, although she was habitually in a state of extraordinary prayer, she never began her prayer without proposing to herself some particular consideration; and she counseled this practice to others, saying: "We should first apply the faculties of the soul to meditation upon some of the truths of Religion, and afterwards form the resolution to combat our passions and labor to acquire the virtues of our state. If the soul is raised to an extraordinary state of prayer, this elevation ought to incline her towards the practice of the Gospel without which it will be an illusion." She has also said: "There are persons who never think of entering within themselves when they pray, and who only desire to have great lights in prayer: these persons wish to build a house by commencing with the roof." She did not

regard as necessary for our spiritual advancement the consolations which one sometimes has in prayer. "I have seen," she said, "persons of eminent virtue who experienced nothing but dryness in prayer. When we are faithful to combat the distractions which assail us in this state, we profit more than if we had had the most sublime thoughts. It is not always necessary to combat these distractions directly; it sometimes suffices to despise them and to abandon one's self sweetly to the Divine Will which permits us to remain incapable of any application." Far from attaching herself to supernatural graces, our Blessed Sister would have avoided them if she had been able to do so without violating the designs of God. She was often favored with them during her great illnesses, in such a way that she then felt no suffering. One day when she was suffering much, the Sisters who were with her expressed their desire of asking God to favor her with one of these graces which would render her insensible to her great sufferings; but she made them understand that, on the contrary, suffering was preferable.

Our holy Father St. John of the Cross has given us many and great examples, by the perfection with which he practiced this point of the Rule upon which we now meditate. We have already had occasion to admire his great fervor in prayer which made him pass the night in this holy exercise without perceiving that the snow was falling upon him through the openings of the poor garret where he prayed. His biographer tells us also that during his journeys he never for a moment lost sight of the spirit of penance and of prayer in which a Religious should continually live. He travelled always on foot, except when his strength would not permit him, and in this case, he made use of the lowliest of animals. As he had for a maxim, that a man who lives as a Religious only when in his Convent and as a secular when out of it, is a sort of monster, he conducted himself so well that he appeared always as a Religious, as well outside as in his Monastery. He always kept a profound silence; he would read some passages from the Holy Scrip-

ture, or recite psalms; he forced himself to walk always in the Presence of God, like our Holy Father St. Elias; and his spirit was so absorbed in the contemplation of the grandeurs of God that when they came to any dangerous places on the road, his companion was obliged to recall him to himself for fear that some accident might happen. In all probability he would once have passed the whole night in a forest, where he had buried himself to meditate more freely, if this same companion had not drawn him out of an ecstasy which had rendered him unconscious to things of earth.

When he arrived at an inn, he took care to withdraw to some retired spot in order more easily to devote himself to prayer. It was in this holy exercise that he learned to practice obedience, humility and charity, those sublime virtues of which he has given us the most beautiful examples, and which have rendered him a perfect model of self-abnegation.

It was prayer which made him despise points of honor, and seize all occasions of abasing himself in the eyes of creatures. One day a certain Provincial of another Religious Order, who took much vanity in his relationship to a Spanish nobleman, asked our holy Father who was visiting him, how he liked his Convent of the Martyrs: "Very well," replied the Saint, "because it is so solitary." "It must be then," replied the other, "that you are the son of a farmer, since you so like the country." "My Reverend Father," humbly replied this model of the Religious spirit, "I am much less than you imagine: I am only the son of a poor country weaver, and I actually have a brother who gains his livelihood by assisting masons." This reply edified all the Religious who were present; the Provincial himself made serious reflections upon it, and profited by the lesson.

In fine, it was from prayer that our holy Father St. John of the Cross drew that generosity and strength with which he supported the pains, the humiliations, the labors of all kinds to which he was subjected, and which made of him a man of sorrows, a model of patience and of virtues the most heroic.

FOURTH POINT

Examen

Has prayer been for us our foremost occupation? Have we not been wanting in generosity to surmount the obstacles which we meet in this holy exercise? Have we not found a thousand pretexts in order to be dispensed from it; at one time work, at another, our health, then again, business? And in cases of real impediment, have we supplied for it by greater interior recollection, and by a more intimate union with God?

Have we made choice of subjects of prayer proper to make us advance in virtue, by correcting our defects and repressing our passions? Have we not, on the contrary, given preference to those subjects which flatter our taste and give us more consolation? Have we not even been so rash as not to choose any, under pretext that we could remain in the Presence of God in repose and silence? Do we enter into the spirit of the Church by taking as subjects of prayer the mysteries or the feasts which it celebrates?

Have we prepared our soul for prayer by silence, modesty, recollection, humility, and detachment from all that is not God? Alas! what negligence in preparing our soul to receive this nourishment which ought to maintain, increase and strengthen within us the life of God!

If our preparation has been satisfactory, have we given all our attention to the "manducation" of this nourishment, by developing with care the points prepared and by offering to the will considerations which would suggest practical resolutions for correcting a particular defect, practising such a virtue, on such an occasion, with such a person?

Have we not sought after sweetness and consolation in prayer, not understanding that the best prayer is the one in which we suffer, in which we learn to renounce and humble ourselves, to labor for God, and accomplish joyfully His holy Will? Ah! if we could understand the worth of such a prayer, what graces it contains, instead of troubling ourselves we would kiss the Hand of our Heavenly Father Who knows better than we what is for our good; and we would

appreciate this bitter nourishment of His choice more than all the sweetness which our natural taste prefers.

If our Lord has been pleased sometimes to give us a nourishment prepared by His own hand, have we received it with humility and gratitude, not taking complacency in this favor, but applying ourselves to draw from it that nutritious sap which ought to sustain our soul and fortify it for the combats of life? Have we not envied the supernatural lights which God sometimes grants to souls? Whereas the light essential for us is that which, at the price of our own efforts, seconded by grace, is drawn forth from the mystical flintstone which is our Lord. Have we taken care to replenish this light by the oil of renunciation, humility, mildness, and patience, each act of which is a drop; and by vigilance in gathering all the graces sown in our path, hidden sometimes beneath rude appearances? Have we not, on the contrary, allowed this little torch to be extinguished by our indolence; and have we not extinguished it ourselves, either by too great an eagerness to light it, by a foolish presumption, or by thoughts of self-complacency and vain glory? Has not our self-love sought to show off this light for its own profit, by exposing it to the eyes of others, less for the pure glory of God and the benefit of our neighbor, than to make ourself noticed?

Have we accepted with gratitude, the darkness which our good Master, in His mercy, substituted for our own lights to conduct us in the right path from which we were turning aside? Have we not then believed that all was lost, and have we not been terrified at the aspect of this darkness, have we not murmured and wished to turn back, instead of allowing ourselves to be led by this cloud in the way of humility, confidence in God, submission to His designs, and union with His Will? Have we understood that our Lord in His poverty, His humility, His obedience, and His immolation for the glory of His Father, is the only true light which we should follow? Any other light turning us away from this path would be illusory.

Have we accepted the truths which the torch of

prayer has shown us under a guise repugnant to self-love? Has not the sight of our powerlessness to produce a good thought, to do the least good of ourselves, cast us down and discouraged us? Have not too much personal activity and a presumptuous confidence in the strength of our own resolutions impeded the action of grace?

In the infirmities of our soul have we had recourse to prayer as to a sovereign remedy? Have we sought in it the strength to uproot our pride and self-love, to subdue the uprising of our passions, to repress our evil inclinations, and render ourselves docile to the impulses of grace?

Has our reason established God as sole Master and Sovereign of our entire being? Alas! are the glory of God and His good pleasure always the motives of our projects and actions? Is it prayer that has prepared our soul for the reception of the Sacraments, recitation of the Divine Office and practices of penance? Does prayer unite our soul to God even in our least actions?

Have we sought from prayer that gentleness, kindness and humility which we should show in our intercourse with our neighbor? Have we had recourse to prayer at all times, according to our different necessities: sometimes as a nourishment, which maintains the life of God within us; again as a torch, which communicates to us the true light of salvation; and again as a remedy, which establishes the reign of God in our soul?

Have we lived by prayer, not only at the hours prescribed by the Rule, but habitually—*day and night*?

Does our heart desire always and in all things, the Will of God, and to act only for His glory? Have we not deluded ourselves in this, and do we love this Divine Will, even when it is contrary and painful to us?

In fine, are we well persuaded that the effect of prayer is to establish the reign of God upon the ruins of our own will? Let us then take a very sincere resolution of living by prayer; let it be our element, if we wish to have true life in us.

CHAPTER FIFTH.

Of the Canonical Hours.

Text: Those who understand how to recite the Canonical Hours with the Priests, shall say them according to the statutes of the Holy Fathers and the approved custom of the Church.

But those who do not, shall say for Matins the Pater Noster twenty-five times.

FIRST POINT.

Those who know how to recite the Canonical Hours

The first words of this text give us to understand that among the souls called to Carmel, all are not capable of reciting the Canonical Hours; and it shows us that Religion in its charity and goodness, has wished to procure for each one, according to his capacity, the means of praising God in union with that which is most holy in the Church. Those who are capable of reciting the Divine Office *shall say it*; these words are formal; they imply an obligation and not a counsel, a duty and not simple devotion. It is, then, important that we should understand:

1st. What the Canonical Hours are, in order to appreciate them.

2nd. The conditions to be fulfilled so as to acquit ourselves of this duty.

3rd. The dispositions which we should bring to their recital.

I. What are the Canonical Hours? It is useless here for us to search out the origin of this holy exercise, its progress, the different changes to which it has been submitted as to its form, by whom and how it has been arranged and regulated such as it now is. It is sufficient for us to know that they are prayers and instructions chosen by our Holy Mother the Church and distributed by her in such a manner that each hour of the day may be sanctified by prayer, the praises of God, thanksgiving for His benefits, and also by petitioning for the graces necessary in the combats and miseries of life. Thus, in the morning, this good Mother puts into our mouth words which are an offering of all our thoughts, words and actions, so that all may be for the glory of God; she makes us appreciate the beauty of the law of God to lead us to meditate upon it throughout the day, and to

excite in our heart a sincere desire to have no other occupation. In the evening she makes us beg for aid from on high against the malignant spirit who, taking advantage of our sleep, may snatch from us the fruits of the day; she obliges us to confess our faults before God, and to humble ourselves profoundly, in order to obtain His pardon.

But let us consider for a moment the various parts of which the Divine Office is composed, so as to appreciate it more.

1st. The greater part of the Divine Office is composed of the psalms of the Royal Prophet, where we find combined all that there is most beautiful, most noble in the heart of an upright man and a soul of royal dignity. There, every heart can find the sentiments which respond to its particular needs; the innocent and the guilty, he who groans under the weight of temptation, as well as he who is immersed in an ocean of peace; the great as well as the little, the rich and the poor; the heart oppressed by affliction and the one dilated with joy: all find words expressing their state or their needs. What a resource in the midst of so many miseries, with so many needs succeeding one another, and which we are powerless to express and represent to our Lord!

2nd. We find each day in the Divine Office some passage from the Holy Scriptures proper to furnish us with very fruitful subjects for meditation. At one time we have to consider the bounty of the Creator which shines in all His works, at another, the personages or the events which prefigure the Messiah; here, we have the Prophecies which announce the coming of the good Saviour^R by which the ardent desires of the Patriarchs were nourished; there, are the writings of the Apostles which contain such admirable instructions to aid us to practise with love and generosity the most sublime virtues. What an advantage for us, if we only identify ourselves with these great Saints and enter into the spirit of the Church in reading and meditating upon their writings.

3rd. In the Divine Office we read also of the Mystery or the life of the Saint, the feast of which we celebrate; this furnishes us with the occasion of rendering to God a tribute of praise in seeing the marvels which He has operated in the Saints; a tribute of gratitude while considering what He has done for us; and again a mo-

tive of confidence which stimulates us to co-operate as the Saints did with divine grace.

4th. Our soul is also nourished at the Divine Office by the reading of the Holy Gospels and of the homilies of the Holy Fathers and the Doctors of the Church, which explain them to us and disclose their hidden meaning.

5th. What shall we say of those beautiful canticles of praise to God placed in the Divine Office to dilate our hearts; what shall we say of the "Gloria Patri" so often repeated to animate our fervor, and excites us to the love of the August Trinity and devotedness to His glory? And the Lord's Prayer, that admirable and incomparable prayer, in which our Divine Master has united all the petitions proper to express our needs! What graces are contained in a single "Pater" well said, what graces consequently in the great number of "Paters" contained in the Divine Office, if we say them with our heart, as well as with our lips, and in union with our Lord! The Angelical Salutation, so efficacious for attracting to earth the benedictions of Heaven through the intercession of Mary, our good Mother, is also often repeated in the Divine Office; and if a single "Ave Maria" works prodigies, what may we not expect from so great a number of "Ave Marias" if we say them in a spirit of faith and confidence? In fine, the "Credo", which recalls to us the truths of the Catholic Faith, and the recitation of which procures for us the consolation of renewing the profession of our faith and causes us to rejoice at being children of God and of the Church!

We, poor ignorant women, are not only permitted but even ordered to unite with so many learned priests, so many holy Religious, so many venerable prelates and holy pontiffs who have acquitted themselves, or are still acquitting themselves of this duty with so much piety and so great glory to God; and, by uniting ourselves to them, we likewise may glorify God. What an advantage!

II. Conditions to be fulfilled.—Our holy Rule directs that we should say the Divine Office; it is a duty of justice and an obligation of love. But how should we say it? *According to the statutes of the holy Fathers and the approved custom of the Church.* Such are the conditions prescribed by the Rule, and which we should fulfill with exactitude so as to acquit ourselves of the obli-

gation of reciting the Divine Office. It is necessary then: 1st. To conform exactly to the rubrics of the Roman Breviary. 2nd. To conform to the regulations and ceremonies of the Order. 3rd. To observe the seasons, the days, the hours, destined by the Church for the different Offices, according to their dignity, etc., etc.

1st. Our own will leads us astray, and even in things which are good in themselves it is necessary that a bridle should restrain and guide us according to the good pleasure of God. It is necessary then that this action, so holy in itself, should have its laws; thus the holy Fathers have regulated and ordained all things concerning it. It is necessary for us to study the rubrics in order to understand them well and to make their right application, it is necessary to foresee each day the changes to be made, the rules to be observed, according to the rite of the Office; in a word, to prepare all that we shall have to say, in order not to expose ourselves to commit faults in consequence of a culpable ignorance. I know well that the study of the rubrics presents some difficulties, and that it is so much the less attractive for us who in general have little aptitude for it; but God Who asks this of us, will bless our labor, if for His love we apply ourselves to it with generosity.

2nd. We should not only say the Canonical Office according to the rubrics, but in our holy Order we must, except when justly prevented, say the Office in Choir with the Community, giving out our voice conforming ourselves to the chant and psalmody customary in the Order, and observing all the ceremonies prescribed. It is necessary, consequently, to study all these ceremonies and apply ourselves to perform them well, remembering that the holy Fathers have traced out all these regulations. Let us then attach as much importance to the observance of these statutes as they have done in drawing them up; and if they who were so holy, so enlightened and so learned, have not believed that they were losing their time in regulating even the least ceremonies, shall we, poor ignorant women, think that we are losing ours while studying them with care in order the better to conform ourselves to them?

3rd. We should also say the Divine Office *according to the approved custom of the Church*, conforming our-

selves to the seasons, the hours, as also to the order of the Offices, according to this *approved custom of the Church*. We should take into account the different rites of the Offices; say each of the Hours in the order prescribed and at the times appointed; say no Office which is not approved, transfer none without necessity; in a word, we must conform in all things to the custom approved by our Holy Mother the Church. She regulates all things with wisdom: should we wish to be more wise than she? If we are obliged to make some slight modification in her prescriptions, it should always be for just reasons and with the approbation of legitimate authority. In this way we shall always live under rule, even while departing from the Rule; for the Church who gives us laws has also given us Superiors who, in her name, can dispense us from them when there is need of this.

III. Dispositions.—All that we have just said refers to the exterior portion of the Divine Office. It now remains for us to consider the interior which is its soul, which gives it life, and without which it would be a dead work, profitless for the glory of God. God wishes to be praised and supplicated in spirit and in truth; He does not wish to be honored with the lips only, but with the heart also. Let us then examine the interior dispositions which should animate us when going to Choir for the Divine Office, and while reciting it.

When going to Choir let us be well penetrated with the thought that we are going to accomplish a divine action, to fulfill the office of Angels, and in union with them. It follows then, that if we know the dispositions with which the Angels acquit themselves of so holy a function, we shall by theirs learn those which we should bring to it.

Ist. The Angels are pure. 2nd. They accomplish with eagerness the orders of God. 3rd. They are always in His presence. 4th. They cover themselves with their wings before His Divine Majesty. 5th. They are attentive to the least wishes of God. 6th. They chant His praises. 7th. They do so without ceasing. 8th. They chant in alternate choirs. These are the eight essential dispositions which we should bring to the Divine Office: purity, zeal, recollection, humility, a loving attention, a holy joy, generosity, fraternal charity, and union of hearts.

1st. Purity.—Nothing defiled can enter Heaven. To enter Choir, which is an anticipated Heaven, since we there fulfill by anticipation the office of the Angels, we should approach as nearly as possible to the purity of these blessed spirits. St. Augustine says that we should make a serious examination of our conscience before entering Choir and sincerely detest in ourselves all that could be displeasing to God. Let us then apply ourselves to acquire this interior disposition of purity of conscience, purity of thought, purity of intention, and purity of affection. This is what we should do when we go to the Preparatory, leaving outside the door all that is foreign to God and His glory, and take holy water with faith and contrition for our faults.

2nd. Zeal.—The Angels fly to execute the orders of God. It is God Who calls us to Choir: we should be animated with a holy eagerness in going there, and be careful to light within us that sacred fire which burned in our holy Father St. Elias and our holy Mother St. Teresa for the glory of God, having but this glory in view when performing the exalted duty to which we are called. Let us not be more zealous to continue some work than to respond to the Voice of God which invites us to go and commence here below that which we shall do eternally in Heaven. Let us leave all with a good heart to fly with the Angels to this Heaven on earth.

3rd. Recollection.—The eagerness which we show in going to Choir should not be hurtful to our recollection. Let us imitate in this the Angels who keep themselves always in the Presence of God, however eager they may be to execute His orders. Let us then not permit any of our faculties to wander; let us keep them occupied with the things of God and beneath His Eye. This Divine Majesty presides at the Holy Office; His Heart rejoices or is afflicted accordingly as we show fidelity or negligence; His Hands are full of graces to be poured out in profusion over the souls whose eyes and heart are fixed upon Him: would we wish by our bad dispositions to deprive Him of the consolation He would have in giving them to us, and likewise deprive ourselves of the increase of grace which we could receive by keeping ourselves recollected in His Divine Presence during the holy psalmody.

4th. Humility.—Although the Angels are filled with

zeal to execute the orders of God, although they do not lose sight of His Divine Presence for a single instant, nevertheless, they cover themselves with their wings before this Sovereign Majesty, recognizing that they are unworthy to gaze upon It. With still greater justice then, let us remain with profound sentiments of humility in the Presence of the thrice holy God, we who are only vile creatures, degraded by sin, unworthy of the least graces, and capable of destroying the work of God. Let us annihilate ourselves profoundly, for, if the words which we repeat in the Divine Office are not the true expression of an interior and sincere humility, our praises, far from glorifying God, will sensibly outrage Him.

5th. A loving attention.—But since, notwithstanding our unworthiness, God wishes to admit us into His holy Presence, in the company of the Angels, let our hearts be filled with love to execute faithfully the wishes of this good Father, by a loving attention to the Office and to the least ceremonies which we have to perform, fulfilling them with the sole view of pleasing Him by doing what is agreeable to Him.

6th. Holy joy.—Let us bring to the sacred psalmody a heart filled with holy joy at the thought that we are chanting the praises of God, that we are proclaiming the marvels of His power, of His goodness, etc. . . . The holy Prophet King rejoiced in God and his soul was transported with gladness at the thought of his Savior. This sentiment of joy, or at least a disposition which dilates the heart, is necessary to aid us to say the Office well, because ordinarily we do well what we do with joy. Let us then try to develop this sentiment by considerations proper to dilate our heart and augment our fervor.

7th. Generosity.—This holy joy of which we have just spoken, disposes us to the generosity which we ought to bring to the recitation of the Divine Office, and without which we cannot acquit ourselves well of it; for the inferior part of our being should remain there, so to say, in subjection, all its movements ought to be regulated by those of the spirit. For this we must overcome indolence, carelessness, sleep; renounce our own ease; subject ourselves in all things to the rules prescribed for the position, the inclinations; not listen to weariness, little inconveniences and difficulties which do not fail to make themselves felt when it is necessary to occupy ourselves with

the things of God. We should not spare ourselves in giving out our voice in the recitation or in the chanting, and should regulate it according to the tone of the Choir, continuing this without relaxation to the end: all this requires great generosity; for, without this generosity, we shall commit many faults, at one time under one pretext, and again under another; we shall accomplish with carelessness and negligence the work of God, and incur the maledictions which fall upon that soul who does the work of God negligently. Let us recall that maxim of our ancient Mothers upon this subject: "Since we are of a nature to wear out, let us esteem ourselves happy to be consumed in the divine service, by giving out our voice generously and not sparing ourselves."

8th. Fraternal charity and union of hearts. Oh, how agreeable to God is this disposition! "The Seraphim," says the Prophet Isaias, "divide themselves into two choirs to chant the praises of God, and particularly to honor His sanctity." What a magnificent concert is that in which all is regulated by charity, in which all hearts, united by this holy bond, chant harmoniously, in divine accord, in the sole view of glorifying God! It is necessary then that the union of voices at the Divine Office, should be the mark and the measure of the union of hearts; it is necessary that chanting in the same tone, the same measure, the same extent of voice, our souls should also accord in one common desire to praise, to glorify, and to love God, banishing from our hearts all sentiments of self-love, aversion and rancor which could trouble that beautiful harmony which ought to reign among us, and which so delights the Heart of God.

SECOND POINT

Let us see how the spirit of our vocation is fostered in the practice of this point of the Rule.

The Divine Office, as we have just said, is composed of all that is most beautiful and most substantial in the sacred books; in such a way that we can there find abundantly wherewith to nourish our mind with holy thoughts which are the source of holy affections, by means of which the spirit of penance, of prayer and of zeal is strengthened in us.

Fidelity to the ceremonies, the rubrics and the hours of the Office maintain the spirit of mortification: for nature would wish to be seated when we must stand; to remain standing when we must kneel or incline; to sleep when we must watch; to be silent when we must chant. This combat against distractions, against lassitude, against sleep, while nourishing the spirit of penance exercises the spirit of prayer, and even reanimates the spirit of zeal. For, in order to combat with success, we must have recourse to God, implore His aid, recall to our mind considerations proper to revive our courage and excite us to the struggle; such as the remembrance of our sins, which necessitate this exercise of penance; what our Lord has suffered for us and what we should suffer for Him; the remembrance of the Presence of God and of the graces which He promises to those who combat for His love; the thought that we may, by our fidelity and fervor, attract the mercy of God upon sinners, who at that moment perhaps, are plunging themselves into crime; and console the Heart of Jesus for the outrages He receives by the great number of sins which are being committed throughout the world. From this arises sentiments of compassion for the guilty; holy affections, acts of love, gratitude towards the God of Mercy Who seeks sinners with so much solicitude, and receives them with so much tenderness when they wish to return to Him; from this, so many acts of devotedness and of zeal in order to lead back to the fold these poor wandering sheep by the fervor of our prayers. Then the soul expands, takes new vigor, and governs the members of the body; the cries and whinings of nature are no longer heard, the body yields without resistance to all that is required; nothing opposes itself to the perfect execution of the ceremonies; in a word, all is fulfilled with exactitude, in an interior spirit, and according to the designs of God.

THIRD POINT

Examples

In order to excite ourselves to fervor in reciting or in chanting the Divine Office, let us call to mind the

examples which the Saints have given us, and the sentiments which they have expressed concerning it; let us recall what we learn from history of the fervor, the holy joy, and the humility with which the holy Prophet King composed and chanted the same psalms which we have the happiness of repeating in the Divine Office.

Let us represent to ourselves those fervent Christians of the first centuries of the Church, whose fervor was not lessened by the length of the Office, and who passed entire nights in this holy exercise, chanting the psalms, hearing the word of God and the explanation of the Holy Scriptures with admirable attention. Let us transport ourselves into those distant solitudes where the silence was interrupted only by the chanting of the psalms, and where, day and night without interruption, the fervent inhabitants of those deserts rivalled one another in their zeal and ardor for chanting the praises of God. Let us consider these holy solitaries reciting the psalter with recollection, joy of heart, interior spirit; joining to this holy exercise mortification and mental prayer, which attracted upon them the most abundant graces of Heaven for advancing each day in the perfection of the ascetic life and in union with God; persevering therein until the end, notwithstanding the attacks of the demon, and the repugnances and revolts of nature. They found so much happiness and so many advantages in this that, when they visited one another, before beginning to converse they chanted psalms together; this excited in them sentiments of fervor which they afterwards communicated to each other in their conversations.

What shall we say of St. Patrick, who persevered so long in the practice of rigorous penance, the sole recital of which terrifies nature, reciting each night the entire psalter: the first one hundred psalms while bending his knees two hundred times, and the rest, with his body plunged in frozen water and his hands and eyes raised towards Heaven!

This is what we read in the Chronicles of our holy Order: "One could not enter into the Choir of the

Convent of Pastrana and behold there so holy a Community assembled to chant the praises of God, without being sensibly touched by their angelic modesty. As their understanding was closely applied to the contemplation of the ineffable greatness of their Sovereign Master and the magnificence of His works, they had the eyes of their body closed to all exterior objects; and while they chanted, one could remark upon their countenance inflamed with divine love, the vigor and holy fervor which animated them. Whether they were standing or kneeling, their countenance was so composed and their interior recollection so profound that the very sight of them caused much consolation. In their chant, which was simple and of uniform tone, their mortified voices accorded so well that one felt devotion in listening to them."

Saint Bonaventure attached so much importance to the recitation of the Divine Office that he would not suffer that anyone during this time should make the least noise capable of distracting the attention; and he himself, as learned as he was, would not read a lesson in Choir without having gone over it before hand so as not to incur the risk of committing the least fault. After this, shall we find it too minute a thing for us to foresee very exactly all that we shall have to recite in the Divine Office?

Let us contemplate the divine Mary during the years which she passed in the Temple, and let us try to form an idea of the dispositions of her heart, the attitude of her body and the modesty of her eyes during prayer and the chanting of the praises of the Lord. Let us unite ourselves with her at the Divine Office, and particularly during the chanting of the admirable Canticle which her humble and grateful heart has transmitted to us.

Let us think often of the praises which the Sacred Heart of Jesus offered to His Heavenly Father during His mortal life and which He ceases not to offer Him in Heaven. Let us represent to ourselves the respectful, modest and recollected attitude of this Divine Master when He prayed in the Temple; the exactitude with which He conformed to the customs

and ceremonies, He who accomplished the law even to the least iota; let us recall the holy anger with which He drove the sellers from the Temple. "My House," said He, "is a house of prayer, and you have made it a den of thieves," teaching us by this action and these words, what a wound we inflict upon His Heart when we bring to the recitation of the Divine Office all kinds of preoccupations, distractions and cares foreign to the holy action in which we are engaged.

FOURTH POINT

Examen

Have we always had a high esteem for the Divine Office, and appreciated the grace which God has given us in calling us to recite it in union with the most holy portion of His Church? Do we nourish our mind and our heart with the beauties contained in the Divine Office? Has the study of the general and particular rubrics and of the ceremonies been the object of our special attention? Have we been careful to look up and to foresee all that we shall have to say and to do? Have we not deluded ourselves in regard to the dispensations which we have asked to absent ourselves from Choir, or to change the hours of the Office?

Are we faithful to leave all occupations at the first sound of the bell which calls us to this holy exercise?

Before entering Choir have we purified our soul from all faults, all the thoughts, all the preoccupations liable to plunge us into sadness, dejection or dissipation; such as, for example, a slight indisposition, some small contradictions, a project which we have in view, etc., and which would expose us to commit a multitude of faults, our attention being thus divided? Have we recited the "Laetatus sum" with an interior spirit, picturing to ourselves that the gate of Heaven was opening to admit us therein in order to praise God with the celestial court? Penetrated with this sentiment have we adored the Divine Majesty Who resides there, and have we kept ourselves in His Presence in a respectful recollection, our heart filled with sentiments of profound humility, recogniz-

ing ourselves unworthy to appear in that holy place and to perform there the office of the Angels? Have these same sentiments contributed to maintain us in exterior modesty? Ah! if I did but think that the Angels cover their faces with their wings before the Majesty of God, should I dare to raise my eyes and gaze around to the right and to the left, without observing any rule of modesty in my bearing?

Have we taken to the Divine Office that loving attention to all the ceremonies, however small they may appear in themselves; that sustained attention which makes us remember what we have to say or do at each moment; that vigilant attention which leads us to repair as soon as possible, the failings which escape us through weakness?

Have we recited the Divine Office with that dilation of heart, that holy joy, which gives vigor to the soul and makes it participate in that joy with which the Saints and the Angels celebrate the glory and the perfections of God?

O my God! when shall we comprehend the honor which Thou hast bestowed upon us in calling us to this heaven of our land of exile to chant Thy praises; and the fidelity, the generosity, the fervor, the exactitude and the love which Thou dost require of us in return for such a favor? Have we assisted at the Divine Office in a spirit of fraternal charity, in order that our hearts might be united as well as our voices? Ah! how ravishing is this concert to the Heart of God?

Have we not disturbed this beautiful harmony by entertaining thoughts contrary to charity; allowing ourselves to be greatly distracted from this holy exercise by the remembrance of a word or a manner of acting which has wounded us, or the examination which we permit ourselves to make upon the bearing or the tone of voice of the others, allowing even some slight movements of impatience to appear?

Have we not been scandalized by the want of exactitude of our Sisters in going to the Divine Office, at the little voice which they there give out, or the faults which they commit; when their presence in

Choir should rather have been a subject of edification to us on account of their generous efforts in surmounting grave inconveniences which, for us perhaps, should have been a motive for having ourselves dispensed from the Office, or at least from assisting in Choir? Do we know the sufferings of her whose voice we do not hear? Do we know what in the sight of God she merits who, notwithstanding all her care to prepare her Office, commits many faults? The complacency which we take in our own punctuality to the least ceremonies has perhaps put us far below those who are the object of our criticism. The thoughts of God are so different from ours! Besides, will God demand of us an account of the conduct of our Sisters since we are not charged with the care of it? What necessity is there for us to raise our eyes to see who enters or who leaves? She who presides has alone this right and this obligation. Why do we permit ourselves to be distracted from the Office even to the point of allowing the chant to fall on account of a word which the Prioress or the Subprioress judges proper to address to a Sister?

If we have had to say the Divine Office in private, have we recited it composedly, in a respectful attitude and preserving the remembrance of the Presence of God? Have we not interrupted the Office or changed the hours without necessity?

O my God! how many faults have we not committed through a want of preparation, both remote and immediate, through a want of actual attention and an interior spirit, through a want of mortification, of zeal, of fervor and of all the dispositions requisite for acquitting ourselves worthily of the duty of the Divine Office! Never, until now, have we so well understood the honor God has conferred in imposing upon us a duty which unites us to the Angels and which makes us pass the greater part of our days in an anticipated heaven; never have we so well understood the fidelity which this grace requires on our part. Thus, in terminating this meditation, let us take a firm resolution of acting according to the light which God has just given us, and to repair with His grace, our past faults.

CHAPTER SIXTH.

Of Not Having Property.

Text: *No Religious is to call anything his own, but let everything be in common. Distribution is to be made to each one by the Prior himself, or by one of the Religious deputed by him, as each shall stand in need, having regard to everyone's age and necessity.*

FIRST POINT.

We find in this Chapter of our holy Rule a great fund of instruction upon the obligation, the extent, the advantages and the practices of holy poverty.

1st. The obligation.—The words of the Rule are formal, they show us that poverty is obligatory: *No Religious is to call anything his own, but let everything be in common.*

Our Lord is the model proposed to us in the Religious life; now, the Divine Master vowed poverty to His Father; He espoused it during all the time of His sojourn upon earth; He declared those blessed who embraced it for love of Him; He said that the disciple is not greater than the Master, and should not be better treated. Our Religious profession renders us disciples of this God-Man, and even more than disciples since it places us in the rank of His Spouses; and with this title we contract the same obligations that He did. Poverty, which is only of counsel for the simple Christian, becomes obligatory for the Religious, the Church having made it the special object of one of the three vows of Religion: this is why the Rule is expressed in terms which remind us of this obligation: *Let everything be in common.* Yes, *let everything be in common*, that we may be poor as was our good Master, and as He wishes us to be, that is to say, let us renounce all the goods of this world, the power of acquiring any of them, of possessing anything whatsoever, and of disposing of anything without the permission of our Superiors. Let us instruct ourselves concerning the obligations and the extent of the vow of poverty, by the reading of those books which treat of it, such as: "Christian Perfection," "The Religious Man," etc., in order not to expose ourselves to sin against this vow through an inexcusable ignorance.

2nd. *No Religious is to call anything his own, but let*

everything be in common. A Religious should not only be poor but her poverty should extend to all things, in such a way that she cannot possess *anything* as a proprietor; she can have only the use of it. We cannot then have anything of our own, be it only a pin; the Rule says formally *anything*, there is then no exception.

Whatever goods a Religious may have brought to or procured for the Monastery, though she may have furnished it and provided it with all things necessary, she can have none of these things as a proprietor; she has no more right to them than another who has brought nothing; and consequently she can no more dispose of them by giving them away, lending them, or using them herself, than if they had never belonged to her. All that is brought to the Monastery is lost in the common goods over which no one has any right of proprietorship, either over the whole or over the least part thereof; the Order alone can dispose of things as it seems good, without anyone being able to claim a right of possession. Thus our language is conformable to this principle, since we cannot say "my book", "my cell", but "our book", "our cell"; and it is the same with regard to all other things of which we have the use. *Let everything be in common.* There is then no exception, for it says *everything* and excepts nothing. Nature may well be terrified and recoil before a poverty which is extended thus, without any exception, to all those things the possession of which places it at its ease; but let us not consult it in this any more than in any other matter; its counsel will withdraw us from the perfection which God asks of us. Rather let us consider, with the eyes of faith, the precious advantages which the perfection of poverty procures for us.

3rd. We are naturally inclined to seek after riches, pleasures, and honors: the virtue of poverty procures these for us abundantly. It enriches us, it renders us happy, and crowns us with immortal glory; while the possession and the love of the goods of this earth impoverish us, render us unhappy and make us vile. He who possesses earthly riches and attaches himself to them, is poor, because something of what he desires is always wanting to him; besides which, he is deprived of real goods, the goods of grace, for our Lord has said that the treasures of Heaven are not for the rich of this world;

on the contrary, that those who despoil themselves of all things for His love, shall receive a hundredfold even in this life. This is realized in Religion, by the practice of true poverty: we despoil ourselves of all property in giving ourselves to Religion and, like a good Mother, it in return provides for all our wants.

The truly poor, being detached from all things, desires nothing; he has always more than he had reason to expect. Are we not rich when we have more than we desire? If the rich attached to the goods of earth, impoverishes himself with regard to the riches of Heaven, the truly poor, by a contrary effect, enriches himself with the treasures of grace. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," says our Lord, "for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." And what is the Kingdom of Heaven if not the possession of God? What riches! And it is true poverty which procures them for us. Thus the more detached and poor we are with regard to things here below, the sooner shall we enter into possession of the sole treasure capable of satisfying our love for riches.

Moreover, poverty makes us enjoy happiness in this life; this is a truth which our Lord has declared in the words cited above, and a truth which we daily experience. Happiness consists, it seems to me, in the accomplishment of our desires, in the absence of the cares and solitudes of life, in the repose and enjoyments of society and of family life: all of which poverty procures for us. As we have already said, the truly poor, as we here understand the term, desires nothing on this earth, all his desires tend towards the riches of Heaven; and, according to the Eternal Truth, poverty, which he has espoused in union with our Lord, makes him enter into the possession of these goods. The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to him: what more can he desire? He possesses a treasure which no one can take from him: what cares, what solitudes can he have? He lives in the company of others who are poor like himself, and who are rich with the same riches which he possesses; sheltered from all jealousies and contentions, loving all as he himself is loved; assisted by them and succoured in his needs, as he is obliged to assist and to aid them as far as it lies in his power; they have one common purse, and the most necessitous is he to whom most is given, without anyone being able to com-

plain of this. God is the bond which unites them, and He is the treasure, the possession of which renders them happy.

What relations of social or family life more cordial, more sweet, more peaceful, and more capable of procuring true and solid enjoyment? Is it thus with the rich of this world, that is to say, the soul that preserves some attachment? She forms desires which are never satisfied; she ambitions what she has not; she fears to lose what she has; and her heart thus occupied is poor in regard to the goods of God; charity is not in it; the love of created goods puts her out of harmony with her neighbour, often even with those dearest to her. If this soul, unhappily attached to perishable goods, is a Religious by profession, what weariness, what cares, what jealousies, what imperfections in her life! Does she taste that profound peace, that divine calm, which the other Religious enjoy? We may say without fear of being mistaken: she who is most happy in Religion is she who is most poor in reality, detaching herself from all things in order to possess no other treasure than God alone.

Lastly, poverty crowns us with immortal glory. It is the Eternal Truth Himself who declares this to us when He says: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." Poverty puts us in possession of an eternal kingdom, and consequently places upon our brow a crown of immortality. If we pass through the ranks of all those crowned in Heaven, we shall see that without the spirit of poverty they could never have acquired that kingdom and that crown; from the first to the last, be they monarchs or laborers, all, in order to acquire them, had to detach themselves from the goods of the earth, to possess them as though they possessed them not, and to use them as though they used them not. Let us then do as they did, and we shall be crowned with them.

4th. Let us not content ourselves with considering poverty only in theory, and with esteeming and loving it after having learned to appreciate its advantages, but let us come to the practice of it according to the spirit of the Rule which directs that *all things be in common*, without anyone being able to *call anything his own*, and that all our needs be provided by *the Prior, or the Religious*

deputed by him, having regard to everyone's age and necessity. We should then, really and in truth, abandon all that we have and all that we could have under the title of proprietor, reserving to ourselves nothing, even of that which seems necessary, since the Order charges itself with furnishing us with all things, as a Mother does with regard to her child.

We must be poor not only in effect but also in spirit, preserving no affection for things the possession of which is forbidden us; "for" as St. Bernard says, "it is not poverty which is a virtue but the love of poverty; and the poor who are praised in the Gospel and declared blessed by the mouth of our Lord, are not those who are poor in worldly goods but those who are poor in spirit and in affection."

In order to practise this virtue as God requires of us, let us not permit our heart to be attached to anything of which we have the use, such as cell, furniture, books, etc. . . . Let us be contented when our offices and all those things to which we are inclined to attach ourselves are changed; it is thus that we shall discover whether or not we have some secret attachments: "for it often happens," says St. Augustine, "that when we possess something we do not think that we have an attachment for it; but when we have it no longer, we feel that our heart was attached to it; for a thing possessed with indifference and without love, is lost without sorrow."

The practice of Religious poverty leads us to retrench all superfluities. *Distribution is to be made to each one as he shall stand in need.* These words of our holy Rule give us to understand that we should neither ask for nor expect to be given anything over and above what is necessary: this would be contrary to the spirit of poverty. When we believe it a duty to ask for something for ourselves or for our offices, we should first examine well if a real necessity justifies our request, and if, with a little industry, we could not do without this object. What does it matter whether a garment fit more or less perfectly, that a piece of furniture or a book be a little more or a little less worn, provided they may still be employed for the purpose for which they are destined?

We should go further still; because the Masters of the spiritual life say that, even with regard to necessary

things, we should be greatly detached, in such a way that we show not too much eagerness and ardor in procuring them. There are some Religious souls who understand this point of perfection so little that as soon as they believe they have need of something, be it in the way of clothing or nourishment, or for their offices, they have neither peace nor repose until they have asked for and obtained it. We see them going to and fro, looking everywhere for the Prioress in order to expose this need to her. Her Reverence may be engaged with another Sister: it matters little, they must speak to her; and is not a refusal or a delay sometimes received with impatience and murmuring?

Again, the perfection of poverty requires that, if God permits us to be in want of something necessary, far from murmuring against the instruments of which He makes use to impose this privation upon us, we adore the designs of His Providence, since nothing can happen without His permission.

The perfection of poverty requires, in fine, that we suffer this want of necessary things in time of sickness, and this is what our holy Rule intends by enjoining upon us the entire renunciation of all things, and by placing us in all our needs in dependence upon another, for it is impossible that the Prioress or the Infirmarian, notwithstanding their vigilance, can foresee and provide all things according to the desires of our nature. Moreover, the poverty of our Monasteries and the difficulty of procuring those things which the rich have in sickness, necessarily exposes us to many privations. Our holy Mother, in our holy Constitutions, has well remarked on this subject, that we should not be afflicted when in sickness we want those things which the rich have in profusion, for in entering Religion we ought to have known that to be truly poor is to want necessities in time of greatest need, as is the time of infirmity or sickness, when we find ourselves assailed by all kinds of wants more or less pressing; but it is then that we show, as our holy Constitutions say, the virtue which we have acquired in health. Whence it follows that, if in health we do not constantly exercise ourselves in detachment from all things, absolutely retrenching all superfluity, showing neither eagerness nor inquietude for necessary things, and even doing without

them with a good heart when an occasion presents itself, when the time of sickness comes we shall appear with all our defects and weaknesses: instead of being poor in spirit, we shall be poor in virtues and in the Religious spirit.

Let us then impoverish ourselves as much as we can, by despoiling ourselves first, of all exterior superfluities and by detaching ourselves even from necessary things. Let us detach ourselves from all affection to creatures, relatives and friends who could occupy a place in our heart at the expense of the love of God. Let us detach ourselves from all that could attract the esteem and affection of creatures; but above all let us detach ourselves from ourselves, annihilating our own intellect, judgment, and will, so that we may not be able to *call anything our own*. Let us abandon ourselves to the Order, our good Mother, who with so much charity charges herself with the duty of being our Providence, *distributing to each one by the Prioress herself, or by one of the Religious deputed by her, as each shall stand in need, having regard to everyone's age and necessity*.

Let us receive in a spirit of faith and gratitude the things which are given for our use, using them in a spirit of great detachment, as though using them not; let us take care of them as things lent to us, of which we shall have to render an account, and which others can withdraw from us without our having the right to make the least objection. Let us take good care not to examine what is given for our use, not to complain nor murmur against the officials deputed by the Prioress to distribute things to us, for thus, we not only fail in the spirit of poverty, but also in charity and in a spirit of faith towards the Prioress; because in confiding an office to a Religious she invests her, so to speak, with her own power to fulfill it. Then the murmuring does not stop at the official alone, but it is also directed to the Prioress and it even attacks God Whose place she holds.

Ah! let us be poor in spirit, and then whatever is given to us, whoever may give it, in whatever manner or in whatever time it is given, we shall always be satisfied; because in all things we shall see the Providence of God, and not the hand of which He makes use in procuring for us what is necessary. Let

us abandon ourselves entirely to the Order which charges itself with the solitude, the foresight and the tenderness of the best of Mothers, in providing for all our needs according to the designs of God and in proportion to our weakness. Oh, how great is our happiness! About what can we any longer feel solicitous, unless it be about our fidelity to the contract we have made with her when she received us among the number of her children; that is to say, to despoil ourselves always more and more from affection to created things, in order to leave the care of all that concerns us to the care of this good Mother who, on her side, will be so much the more faithful to her engagements towards us in proportion as she sees us faithful to those which we have contracted with her. In effect, the more we render ourselves voluntarily poor, the more she will enrich us; the more we forget ourselves the more will she think of us; the more we rely upon her, the more tender and assiduous will her care of us become. Ah! let us learn by experience how capable this practice is of leading us to the highest perfection, and at the same time of filling us with unspeakable consolation.

If all Religious souls would understand well this life of abandonment, in a spirit of faith, they would be happy with a real happiness, they would find in Religion a foretaste of the delights of Heaven where God alone is the felicity of the Saints.

SECOND POINT

The first point of our Meditation shows us evidently that the strict poverty to which we are obliged is a powerful auxiliary for acquiring the spirit of penance and of mortification; for the renunciation of all things deprives us of a number of little natural enjoyments and furnishes us with frequent occasions for mortifying the senses and the inferior part of the soul; it obliges us to renounce our inclinations entirely, since we can choose nothing, keep nothing, and ask for nothing to satisfy them. What is **necessary** and nothing more; often even less than what is necessary when Divine Providence permits us to be for-

gotten, neglected, or that it is impossible to provide for us.

By forbidding all proprietorship, the Rule deprives us of the pleasure of disposing, according to our own will, of what we have the use; we can only use it as a thing lent, for one purpose and not for another. It deprives us of the pleasure of receiving or of making little presents, of the consolation of giving alms or donations; in a word, this state of nothingness in which the poverty of the Order places us facilitates for us the habit of penance, mortification and renunciation—a habit which, with the aid of grace, gives us the true spirit of mortification.

This nothingness also gives us more facility for prayer; because the spirit of poverty and of entire renunciation procures great peace for the soul, delivers it from a great number of distractions and solitudes, withdraws it from the world and from itself and unites it intimately to God. The soul which clings to anything is distracted and preoccupied by that object; but she who clings to nothing, elevates herself without effort to her centre and remains there without difficulty.

A soul devoid of the spirit of poverty and of mortification is preoccupied at prayer with what contradicts her, with what makes her suffer, with what is given to her, or what is not given to her; she seeks the means of acquiring or of avoiding what is convenient or inconvenient; she calculates in order to know how she can get rid of such a garment, of such a little piece of furniture which does not suit her; how she can procure this or that; she seeks to guess by the conduct of the Prioress, or of the officials, the motives which lead them to give her such a thing rather than another; she makes comparisons, she asks herself why they do not treat her as they treat such or such a one . . . poor soul! she has not the spirit of renunciation and so cannot possess that of prayer. She would greatly wish not to be thus distracted and preoccupied; she combats these importunate thoughts; but she does not see that she cannot destroy the effect without destroying the cause; she does not con-

sider that it is necessary for her to attack the root of these distractions by despoiling herself of the attachment which she still has to her own convenience; she does not notice that this is the thread by which she is bound and which must be cut, and that it is the spirit of poverty and renunciation that is wanting to her. If our Lord has said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven," can we not say that those who are not poor in spirit are unhappy and in want of God?

The heart of the truly poor, on the contrary, is entirely free and disengaged; no tie binds it; it is free and pure; no obstacles oppose the reign of God within it. When God has thus made His dwelling in this pure heart, He attracts and unites this soul to Himself. Now, as we have already remarked several times, from this union proceeds true zeal for the glory of God and the good of souls. This zeal, having its source in God, is like to the zeal of God which performs all things for His own glory and the good of souls. Thus the soul who by poverty and prayer is united to God, has no other end in view than His glory.

But when we are not poor in spirit, the time which we take to reflect upon our wants, upon the means of procuring or of preserving what is for our convenience, and to which we cling, this time, I say, is taken from that which God has given us to meditate upon what He is, what we are, what He has done for us, what we have done against Him, what He asks of us; upon the needs of the Church and of souls; upon the means we ought to take to correct our defects, to advance in virtue and to procure the glory of God.

Thus the poorer we are in spirit and in truth, the more entirely we abandon ourselves to Divine Providence without reflecting upon ourselves, without attachment to anything whatsoever, without preoccupation or apprehension of what may please or displease us, the more facility shall we find to occupy ourselves with God and His glory alone; and is not this the spirit of our holy vocation?

THIRD POINT

Examples

Our Lord, during His mortal life wished to have nothing in quality of proprietor, either in what concerned His lodging, His food or His clothing: He was born poor, He lived poor, and He died despoiled of all things. The place of His birth did not belong to Him; and He has said Himself that He had not whereon to lay His head. He took the clothing which was given to Him. In the stable, at Nazareth, at Jerusalem, on Calvary, at the sepulchre, He allowed Himself to be clothed or despoiled of His clothing, according as Divine Providence had ordained.

He nourished Himself with the food which was prepared for Him in the different places through which He passed; He took care of only one kind of food: the accomplishment of the Will of His Heavenly Father. When He worked at Nazareth during His hidden life He made use of the tools which St. Joseph put into His hands; He slept upon the poor bed prepared for Him by His divine Mother; He clothed Himself with the tunic which she gave Him.

When He passed from one place to another He took nothing with Him; He had neither provisions, nor money to buy them. Wishing one day to give food to the multitude which had followed Him, He had recourse to the little provisions of a young man there present, and He miraculously multiplied this bread and fish, not for the one who had brought them, but for those who had left all to follow Him, forgetful even of the care of providing themselves with food. A double example most proper to make us understand how much our Lord loves poverty, and how it pleases Him to provide for the needs of those who render themselves poor after His example and for His love.

Let us remark that among the five thousand persons who had followed the Son of God, only one young man had brought anything for nourishment and that this little provision was taken from him and given to the five thousand, who were all satisfied. Is this not continually renewed in favor of Religious souls?

Miracles are wrought in favor of those who think only of following Jesus in the way of perfection, forgetting the needs of nature, and taking no pains about their lodging, their clothing and their food. How many times, on the contrary, does it not happen that those who think most about procuring for themselves what they believe to be necessary, are precisely those who find themselves, by the permission of God, less better served!

Our holy Father St. John of the Cross practised poverty with great perfection. He was poor in his exterior; his clothing, his cell, his furniture, his food; all in him recalled the extraordinary poverty of the ancient solitaries. In his cell, which was very narrow and inconvenient, he had only one paper image, a cross of reeds, a bed made out of bundles of twigs interwoven; sometimes a simple plank attached to the wall served as the table upon which he wrote. His only library was a Bible; and when he had need of any other book, he went to the common library for it and took it back as soon as he no longer needed it. When as Vicar-Provincial he made the Visitation of the houses of his Province, if he found in the cells of the Fathers or the Nuns a thing of any value, although it was an object of devotion, he took it away. But in this, as in all other things, he was the first to give the example; he went so far as to despoil himself of a picture of our holy Mother St. Teresa, although it was very useful to him, recalling as it did the pains which she had experienced and the great things she had done for the glory of God.

After the example of this great Saint, he had a horror of magnificent buildings which were more like palaces than the dwellings of penitents. He wished that the lodging of a Religious should be as poor as his food; and as to this he limited himself to just what was necessary to preserve life. With this he believed himself to be the man who was most richly provided for in the world. "Yes, since I have reduced myself to nothing," said he, "nothing is wanting to me." One day when he was travelling, and suffering with a fever, with a great disgust for all

food, he found on the wayside some asparagus, in a place where it was not likely to be and at a time when it seemed to him that he could not partake of any other kind of nourishment. If he had tormented himself about procuring it, if he had murmured because it had not been given to him, should he have had the happiness of being the object of the care and attention of Divine Providence?

How many examples of this kind can we not find in the Chronicles of our holy Order! How many Religious men and women do we not there see miraculously aided in their wants! To how many sick Religious has not this good Mother, Divine Providence, sent fruits and other food which they could not have procured without her assistance, either because it was not then the season for them, or because of other preventing causes! How many entire Communities were there, animated by a true spirit of poverty, who at a moment when the Religious were rejoicing in God upon seeing that they had nothing to eat, would see provisions of all kinds arrive without knowing whence they came! How many Religious men, venerable for their age, would not keep a picture or a sheet of paper without permission!

St. Gregory of Nazianzen so much loved the practice of holy poverty that expressing the joy which he felt in his heart at having left all things, he beautifully styled himself a bird of lofty wing, which disengaged from all things takes its flight towards those heavens into which the holy Prophet Elias was only borne after having cast off his mantle.

A holy anchorite passed the greater part of his day in thinking of God and chanting His praises; when he returned to his cave, pressed by hunger, he would often find there the table set and upon it bread of admirable whiteness and of delightful taste, with which he nourished himself while rendering thanks to Him Who takes care of those who seek first the Kingdom of Heaven.

Another anchorite found himself in the greatest necessity; an Angel appeared to him in sleep and said: 'Arise and take for thy nourishment what thou shalt find before thine eyes.' The Saint arose and

saw a spring of limpid water bordered with tender herbs which had an excellent odor: he gathered some, ate them, and drank of the water from the fountain; and he assures us that never in his life had he tasted anything like it. He found in the same place a cave where he dwelt some time; and as he was seeking God alone, God on His part never failed him in any need. One day when he had nothing to give to the anchorites who had come to see him, a young man presented himself, gave him provisions, and then disappeared. Have we ever witnessed miracles of this kind in favor of those souls to whom it seems as if the very earth under their feet is going to fail them, (according to the expression of our holy Mother St. Teresa,) when they have not something which they believe to be necessary?

St. Lawrence Justinian, seeing his Religious sad and afflicted because that part of the Monastery where the provisions were kept had been burned, said to them with a gay and serene countenance: "Ah! my children, what evil has befallen us? Have we not vowed poverty? Blessed be God Who, by this accident, has placed us in a state in which we can accomplish our vow!"

St. Bernard, that great model of detachment and of religious poverty, after having shown us by his conduct with what generosity we should renounce all that is not God, has left us in his writings precious lessons which teach us that the true spirit of poverty admits of neither sadness or dejection when we are deprived of something which we believe to be necessary. "We see some poor persons," says he, "who, if they had the true spirit of poverty, would not be so sad and so cast down when they feel some of its effects. And who are these? They are those who wish to be poor, but on condition that they have all that is necessary; they love poverty provided they suffer no privation: this is a pleasing poverty indeed!"

St. John Climacus was of the same opinion. After having experienced the happiness tasted by the soul who is truly poor, he said that the Religious who loves poverty is exempt from all the complaints which arise from anxieties for things here below; but that

if anything on earth is capable of afflicting him, he cannot say yet that he is poor.

FOURTH POINT

Examen

Have we the spirit of poverty? Are we really detached from those things which are, or may be given for our use? Have we not loved the name rather than the virtue of poverty? St. Vincent Ferrer says that it is not a praiseworthy thing simply to be poor, but it is praiseworthy to love the inconveniences which poverty brings with it. "Many," says he, "glory in the name of being poor, and why? because nothing is wanting to them." Are we not of this number? Whence comes it that we are sad or in a bad humor when something of which we believe we have need is wanting to us? Whence comes it that we complain or reproach others when they mislay or injure some object of which we have the use? Have we deprived ourselves of all that is superfluous in our cell or in our office? Do we not preserve some object which, without any great sacrifice to ourselves, we could relinquish, but of which we have not the courage to deprive ourselves for fear that one day we may need it, or because it is a convenience to us? Do we appreciate, do we love poverty, when we are saddened by the sight of a garment, some food, or some other object which is poor and repugnant to nature?

Where is the spirit of poverty when we feel so much pain when something is given to another Sister which we desire for ourselves, or when they give us what does not suit us? Whence is it that we find a thousand reasons, or rather a thousand pretexts, to criticise the distribution of those objects which we covet or which are repulsive to us? Whence comes those schemes to procure for ourselves what we desire? St. Macarius teaches us that in this case we return to the world by a little door after having left it by a large one. In effect, we have left our parents, and renounced our goods to make a vow of poverty, and then we place our affection upon such trifles as a knife, a chair, a book!

Does our language breathe the spirit of poverty,

and in speaking of things of which we have the use, do we always say "our" and not "my"? Do we know how to lend and to give with a good grace what is asked of us? Have we not offered a thousand difficulties and observations about lending some object, requesting that it be well taken care of and returned exactly as it was when given?

Have we not exposed ourselves to great temptations of murmuring against the Prioress and the officials, by examining too curiously what they serve to us, or destine for our use, in order to see if it is very convenient, proper and suitable? When we have thus regarded things which were given us, is it not then that we allowed ourselves to be overcome by fretfulness and sadness, forgetting that it was Divine Providence who provided for our needs by means of the Prioress, or one of the Religious *deputed by her*, without there having been any negligence on their part, nor any intention of contradicting us or of making us suffer?

Have we not been happy and without care when, conducting ourselves as one truly poor in spirit, we have neither looked at, nor tasted, nor touched, by way of examination, what has been given us, receiving it with gratitude, humility and a spirit of faith, seeing in it only God and His Providence, considering only the mercy of the good God Who wishes to clothe and nourish us better than we deserve; since, in truth, by our sins we have merited, not a garment either new or patched which has been given to us, but one of flames; not the food which is served to us, but a nourishment of sulphur and brimstone, and so on of all the rest. Is it not, when looking at things with the eyes of faith, that we are content with all that the Order gives us, seeing in truth that we are too well treated? Could we complain when we remembered that we were served and clothed by the well-beloved Spouses of our Lord, who employed all their time in this exercise of charity? one of whom destroys her health near an almost continual fire in order to prepare the food which is necessary for us; another who washes and cleans what we have soiled; one who mends our clothing; another who gives her-

self no repose in order to take care of us when sick, etc. . . .

When we consider that we are surrounded by Angels charged by our Lord to provide for all our necessities, is it not then that we find no reason to envy the happiness of the holy anchorites served by Angels in the desert, and who had no other care but to love God, to know and to accomplish His Will? Let us acknowledge that our complaints and our discontent come only from a want of the spirit of faith in the practice of poverty!

Have we not created wants by force of studying the effects which this or that produces upon us? Have we not sought to procure for ourselves all sorts of little conveniences in the offices in which we have been employed, not knowing how to do without objects which we believed necessary, and for which a little industry and the spirit of poverty could supply?

Have we not failed in order and cleanliness, thus occasioning damage to the common goods? Disorder makes us lose our time; we mislay objects, and the time we take in looking for them is lost in regard to our work. Things in disorder and not well kept, deteriorate, become broken and destroyed; they must be replaced much sooner than if they had been taken care of and preserved: this is so much taken from the common good; and at the end of a few years, without our perceiving it, we have occasioned great expenses, which would not have been incurred if we had had the spirit of order and cleanliness. Have we through a love for holy poverty taken care of our clothing, our books, and everything of which we have the use, not because it is ours, but because it belongs to the common good for which we are responsible if we do not take care of it?

Do we support the privation of what is necessary in a spirit of poverty, that is to say, without complaint or discontent? Have we not displayed too much eagerness and too much activity in procuring for ourselves that of which we believed we had need, not knowing how to suffer a little delay, and not praying in order to consider before God if the thing is truly

necessary, pressing and indispensable, or if it would not be more agreeable to God and more useful to our advancement to do without, or to wait for it for some time?

Have we not made ourselves proprietors by disposing, according to our wishes, of things given for one use and not for another; by taking from one office into another an object which had been given to us for that office and not for the other, a thing which we cannot do without permission? St. Thomas says that when a thing is given to a Religious it is not given to him that he might do absolutely what he wills with it, because he has not this right which implies proprietorship; but it gives him only a limited use for such or such a need, so that a Religious cannot, of himself, employ it for any other use, and if he does, he acts as master of it and he sins. If a Religious is given some bread, or any other food, it is in order to nourish himself and to take for this purpose as much of it as is necessary, even all of it if he needs it. This is why, although he may not need all of it, or although he retrenches a part from his necessity, he cannot dispose of the rest, because it does not belong to him; thus he cannot give nor send a part of his repast to any one whomsoever without permission.

After this, it is evident that we do wrong if we dispose without permission in favor of another, for example a sick person, anything which has been given to us, not for the sick but for ourselves.

We do wrong when we employ the objects given for our use, for any other purpose than that for which they have been given. How many times has it not happened that we have acted as proprietors by disposing of things according to our liking?

Have we always asked permission to do some mending on our clothing, to put some stitches in an article, or undo others according as we think it is necessary? When in charge of an office, have we provided for the wants of our Sisters with charity and impartiality, having regard to age and infirmity, and according to the intentions of the Prioress? Have

we not made observations and even reproached the Sisters upon their manner of acting, remarking that they were exacting, difficult to please, and that they soiled or wore out things that were given for their use? Have we not tried to teach them indirectly, when we dare not say openly what we wished to have them understand, without having the right or the authority to do so? How many times have we forgotten that the offices are confided to us only in order to furnish the Sisters with what is necessary, conformably to the intentions of the Prioress, and not according to our own views; that this service which we render to them does not give us any authority over them; that, however multiplied their needs may be, we should never show them the least discontent, either because of the pain and labor it costs us, or on account of the expense which it occasions? If the fault is theirs, it is the Prioress who is charged with the care of reprimanding them, and not the official who only has to distribute things to them.

Have we not taken more care of the things which we use ourselves than of those used by others, or for common use? Have we understood well that it is through a spirit of attachment and proprietorship that we are careful about what concerns ourselves and negligent of all the rest; that we do not wish any one to touch that of which we have the use for fear that she might spoil it, while we fear not to spoil or to mislay objects in common use, such as garden tools, kitchen utensils, lavatory articles, etc?

Have we supported patiently and with resignation the privation of necessities in time of sickness? Have we abandoned ourselves in a spirit of detachment and of poverty to Divine Providence, receiving in gratitude and humility the care and the reliefs which have been given to us, and as gladly accepting in a spirit of faith the privation of those things which nature believed to be necessary? Have we been well satisfied when sick to be treated like the poor? How many times have we not desired the treatment which the great ones of the world receive rather than that which the King of Glory received on Calvary in the midst of His greatest sufferings?

Oh, how senseless we are! Oh, how inconsistent! We consider it an honor to be called the Spouses of our Lord, we wish to be united to Him in time and in eternity; and yet we leave Him to suffer alone, despoiled of all things, having only a little vinegar and gall for His drink, and we seek to procure for ourselves all the relief, all the aid, and all the kindness which the rich have in their sickness and infirmities! It is necessary that our food should be well prepared, neither too watery nor too salty, neither too hot nor too cold; dressed with care; unhappy the poor cook or infirmarian who forgets some of the conditions required in order that the food be to our liking! Let us act in good faith and acknowledge that such conduct on our part condemns us entirely and shows one of two things: either that we are not the Spouse of a God, poor, suffering, and overwhelmed with bitterness, or that we are unfaithful Spouses.

To resume all that we have said, let us conclude that the poverty of which we make profession obliges us to entire detachment, to a complete renunciation of all things, a detachment which we have ~~not~~ ^{neither} understood nor practised until now, but which we desire to practise well for the future, in order that we may enrich ourselves with the treasures of poverty, procure for ourselves that perfect happiness of the truly poor, and possess the Kingdom promised to the same poor in spirit.

We wish then henceforth to deprive ourselves of all superfluities, of whatever kind they may be; to detach ourselves from all that is not God; to do without necessities in health and even in sickness; to impoverish ourselves always more and more in exterior things, human and sensible consolations, particularly what flatters our self-love, and to tend to an entire abnegation of ourselves.

We shall think often of the advantages of poverty, of the vow we have made; we shall examine ourselves from time to time so as to see where we are in regard to its practice, and we shall unite ourselves to our Lord in this same practice that it may be agreeable to God.

CHAPTER SEVENTH

Of What May Be Had in Common

Text: *You may, if necessary, keep asses or mules, or some cattle and poultry for food.*

FIRST POINT.

When there is question of having nothing of our own, as we have seen in the preceding Chapter, the terms of the Rule are formal, and signify an obligation: *You are not to have*, but when there is question of possessing anything, even in common, there is a simple permission which we find expressed by these words: *You may have*. What is it that we are permitted to have in common? Are they objects of luxury, amusement, or commerce? *You may have asses or mules*, that is to say, only what is most poor, most common, least costly, most easy to procure, least difficult to maintain, and which give no occasion for amusement or vanity; and only what is conformable to the spirit of penance and of poverty of which we make profession.

But for what use are we permitted to have these animals? *You may, if necessary, keep asses or mules*. The thing is evident: it is then for necessity alone, according to our locality and the work to be done. In Monasteries situated at some distance from cities, these beasts of burden are necessary to carry provisions; in those Monasteries which have a large field or garden, they may be equally necessary in the cultivation and the irrigation of the land.

The Rule only designates the kind of animals in order that we may not be mistaken in giving too wide an interpretation to this point, and may not withdraw from the spirit of poverty; but it does not fix the number, because this is to be determined only according to necessity: here, two of them are necessary; there, only one will suffice; and in other places they may even do without them altogether.

What are the other animals of which we may make use, and for what purposes? *And some cattle and poultry for food*. They are not then flocks of sheep in order to carry on trade, but only a few cattle and poultry necessary to furnish the Community with milk and eggs.

Some cattle and poultry for food. The terms are

precise: it is impossible to interpret them in a manner which favors a certain attraction which many persons have for little pet animals which amuse them and occupy them sometimes much more than they should. Our profession of poverty and of penance forbids this; and it would be to act contrary to this point of the Rule to permit ourselves to have in common other animals than those which are necessary for the ends designated, (work and nourishment). But, some perhaps may say, what harm can there be in having in one's cell a little bird with which one may unbend herself for a few moments while listening to its pretty chirping and considering its varied colors? What harm to have in the house some little animals which could recreate the Sisters, either in the garden, the recreation room, or elsewhere? The thing is not bad in itself, but the Rule of Carmel prohibits it as contrary to the perfection of our vocation; and that which might be a matter of indifference for others or even be useful in leading them to praise God and to serve Him better, would be for us an obstacle in the way of abnegation and union with God to which we are called. What is specified in regard to domestic animals is also to be understood concerning all other objects of luxury, of amusement and of curiosity; and it is in this sense that our holy Constitutions forbid us not only objects of this kind but also works which are curious, or of an exquisite kind, capable "of occupying the mind and distracting it from the recollection of the presence of God".

Our weakness is so great, our nature leads us so easily towards what pleases it, that, without these wise precautions, we should fill our houses with useless things, and should end by occupying ourselves less with God and our duties towards Him than with these thousands of objects in which we should, in some sort, place our felicity; and our Monasteries, far from being houses of penance and of prayer would become places of repose and of recreation.

All these amusements, as we have already said, are contrary to the strict poverty of which we make profession; they are in opposition to the penance which we have embraced and an obstacle to our union with God.

In the first place, poverty obliges us to labor, and even our recreations do not dispense us from this obligation.

Our Constitutions say expressly, in speaking of this hour of mental relaxation: "And during this time they are to do their work"; and when at recreation our ancient Mothers saw any Sister suspend her work in order to speak, they would reprove her for it saying that one could "easily work and speak at the same time".

In accordance with our spirit of poverty all our time ought to be usefully employed. The same spirit forbids any expense, however trifling it may be, the object of which is not useful; for all that tends to superfluity makes a breach in poverty, whence it follows that birds and other trifles, exposing us to lose our time or to incur useless expense, are contrary to poverty. But if these objects of fancy or of curiosity have been given to us, what harm could there be in using them, since they have occasioned no expense? A loss of time is always found in it, for it will always be at the cost of labor that these objects are cared for.

Moreover, the spirit of poverty ought to make us despise all these things, and the eyes of the truly poor should meet everywhere only poor objects. The truly poor in spirit withdraws herself from all that is not absolutely necessary, and even in necessities she wishes to see in all things the mark of poverty. So our houses, if they are inhabited by the truly poor, must have nothing which gives an impression of comfort or attracts curiosity; this is the spirit of the Rule upon which we now meditate.

SECOND POINT.

We have just seen, in the first point of this Meditation, that the spirit of penance forbids us those diversions and amusements which vain things and trifles, sought after by certain persons with so much eagerness, can procure us; it is then evident that our holy Rule, in imposing upon us these privations, facilitates for us the acquisition of the spirit of penance. First, what we are permitted to have in common should be very poor and what is absolutely necessary; nature, the senses, the mind, cannot find any pleasure in the possession of these objects; on the contrary, they can only meet with subjects of mortification. The privation of all that can flatter the senses unceasingly recalls to us the obligations which we have contracted of renouncing all things, of practising penance, and of seek-

ing God alone. Our heart is weak and allows itself to be easily seduced by all that pleases nature; and our holy Rule, in retrenching all these superfluities, withdraws from us the attractions by which we might be surprised and allow ourselves to be led captive. By surrounding us with poor objects only, it implants in our soul habits of mortification and detachment which favor the spirit of prayer.

Let us acknowledge, to our confusion, that our heart is so weak that if the Rule were not so precise, and did not impose upon us so many privations, we should not blush to allow this heart made for God alone to beat for a little animal which it loves, which is caresses, and with which it loses so much precious time given us only to love and to serve God. Let us thank this God of Goodness for having thus retrenched all that is capable of withdrawing us from Him and from the end of our holy vocation.

If we were permitted to have large flocks of sheep to trade with, or other animals with which to recreate ourselves, the cares which the one would entail and the distractions occasioned by the others should infallibly injure the silence and recollection necessary for prayer. This would not only be an obstacle to the habitual union of our soul with God, but it would also prevent us from making prayer at the hours marked out by the Rule.

Let us again acknowledge that this point of the Rule facilitates the acquisition of the spirit of prayer by the retrenchment of objects of distraction and by the facility which it gives us of providing our nourishment by means of cattle and poultry without being obliged to have frequent intercourse with seculars. Thus, whether the Rule retrenches or whether it permits, it is always in order to favor silence, retirement and recollection; and consequently to favor union with God, and zeal for the glory of His Divine Majesty. Let us then be very faithful to the exact practice of this point of the Rule and we shall acquire the perfection of our holy vocation.

THIRD POINT.

Examples.

The Holy Family, which should serve as a model to us in the practice of our holy Rule, had no large flocks nor rare and curious animals; they had at most an ass for

their journeys, or for the transportation of the materials necessary for the labors of St. Joseph.

The Gospel tells us that our Divine Master made His entrance into Jerusalem mounted upon an ass, borrowed for this purpose by His Disciples.

Among the Saints who have embraced the evangelical poverty of which we make profession, a great number have not even made use of the permission that we have of possessing in common some cattle and poultry. How many were there who habitually deprived themselves of eggs and white meats? How many who deprived themselves of the innocent pleasure of caressing and of looking at the little animals with which they met their solitude. . . .

A solitary who was a contemporary of St. Gregory the Great, and who gave himself up to all the exercises of the eremitical life, having renounced great riches which he possessed in the world, only reserved to himself a little domestic animal which he kept without scruple in his solitude. It occurred to him one day to ask God to be willing to show him the place that he should have in Heaven for having left all things for His love: our Lord made known to him that he would be seated in the same rank as Pope Gregory. This good solitary was much afflicted at the thought that the voluntary poverty which he had embraced would not raise him higher in Heaven than a Pope who possessed such great riches. As he could not understand this equality of recompense with this inequality of life, God in His mercy, wishing to enlighten him and at the same time to instruct us, made known to him that his attachment to that little animal and the pleasure he took in caressing it, made him, in some sort, less poor than St. Gregory, who far from loving his riches made use of them only to do good and to succor the poor. He then understood that poverty of spirit does not consist in the value of a thing, but in detachment.

We have previously seen that our holy Father St. John of the Cross ordinarily made his journeys on foot; and, in cases of absolute impossibility, he made use of the poorest and most common of animals. We read in the Chronicles of our Order that our Fathers did the same; nothing could make them act otherwise, none among

thẽm wished, by condescending to his infirmities, to open the door to relaxation in regard to this point of poverty. In the same spirit they often made an examination of their cell or office in order to assure themselves that they had nothing useless or superfluous, or any object to which they might be ever so little attached, so as to deprive themselves of it as quickly as possible, fearing that this would be an obstacle to their advancement in pure love, according to this maxim of our holy Father St. John of the Cross: that attachment to anything, however small it might be, suffices to withdraw us greatly from our Sovereign Good. And since our nature has such a propensity to attach itself even to these nothings, let us bless our Lord that He has taken from us, by means of our holy Rule, so many objects capable of exciting our covetousness. Let us also fear to allow ourselves to be seduced and drawn away by this unfortunate inclination, and to attach ourselves to objects of less value than those of which we are deprived, and thus forget that it is not being poor according to the spirit of the Rule to have an affection for what we are permitted to keep, or to lose our time in useless amusements with animals which necessity alone authorizes us to possess in common. Let us profit by the example of the Saints by regulating our conduct according to theirs.

FOURTH POINT.

Examen.

Let us now see, in the presence of our Divine Master, if we have always observed this point of the Rule in its perfection, that is to say, if on all occasions we have been animated by this spirit of absolute detachment from all that is not God, and if we have lived according to the spirit of poverty required by the Rule.

Have we understood well that we cannot have anything useless or curious, nothing for our own satisfaction? Have we taken care to deprive ourselves of all which, in our cell, in our office, or in our work, was not necessary? Have we from time to time, looked over all these objects, and examined our conscience to discover if there was not in us a little relaxation in the rigor of poverty?

Have we sufficiently understood that the little which

we are permitted to have ought to be of a common and poor quality, which can conduce little to pleasure?

Have we not lost our time and the spirit of recollection with an animal which has been given to us only through necessity, and not in order to divert ourselves with it? How many times have we not lost precious moments in caressing and looking at these animals? Have we not shown too much natural eagerness in the care which we have been directed to give them, attaching ourselves to this occupation, and seeking in it our satisfaction? Or have we not on the contrary, despised this kind of occupation, allowing these domestic animals to suffer or to perish for want of care, thus forgetting that all which the Orders confides to us, however vile it may be in itself, ought to become precious in our eyes for the sole reason that it belongs to this good Mother? Have we not made a difference between the offices? These distinctions are contrary to the spirit of God, for nothing is little in the House of the Lord; and in reality, the action which appears the greatest in itself is without value if it is not ennobled by intentions, pure and conformable to the good pleasure of God. Have we always considered in our employments the good pleasure of God, His glory and our advancement? Have we not given ourselves with more eagerness to those which were more conformable to our taste and which flattered our self-love?

Have we not had the folly to believe that we were losing our time when we were employed in occupations which seemed to us base, of little importance or of little profit to the house? Have we not had the temerity to think that we should render greater service to the Order if an employment were given us where we could show the talents which we believe we have, instead of being employed in an office below our capacity? Perhaps we should have been more flattered and better satisfied to be employed in the direction of souls, than in taking care of chickens necessary for the common good? Perhaps the care of the Novices would have better suited us than that of the cattle? Perhaps the charge of the business affairs of the house appeared more honorable to us than to gather eggs or other like things?

Does not our conscience as Religious tell us that it is contrary to our holy profession to view things in this

manner? Where is the Religious soul who sanctified herself by following such ideas? Where is the Religious soul who raises herself in the eyes of God by means of the pedestal which she has made with such materials? What folly! what misery!

Let us not forget what we came to Religion to seek and what we had been so happy to find in the beginning. Was it not the assurance of always doing the Will of God by giving ourselves up to obedience, which formed our happiness? Did we then make distinctions in the employments, did we then find anything too poor? Did we not appreciate this entire deprivation of all that flatters nature? Did we not find great advantages in having for our use, and in the Monastery, only common and very poor objects? Why then should we allow this perverse nature which was then so submissive to faith, to revive again? Let us take care: it is not at one blow that one loses the spirit of her vocation. We commence by giving a little liberty to the senses, by permitting ourselves some enjoyment, some conveniences, pleasing ourselves in considering some agreeable or curious object which offers itself to the sight; we accept with pleasure and delight some enjoyment of the hearing, the sight, the smell and the touch; then we seek after these occasions; we pardon ourselves immortifications which at first escape us from human frailty, afterwards half voluntary, then finally, entirely consented to. A disgust for poor and mortifying things follows; a search after all that pleases us becomes our ordinary occupation; we complain, murmur, revolt if we are deprived of them; and in the end, if God in His mercy does not recall by a great grace the soul which thus strays, it falls down the precipice and becomes unfaithful to what it had promised to its God.

Let us then carefully examine our conduct and our affections. Do we esteem the poverty of which we make profession according to its true value? or rather, do we not appreciate it less than in the beginning of our Religious life, when we felt so ardently the need of belonging entirely to God and of despising everything else? Have we not already given entrance into our soul to an affection for some creature, animate or inanimate, and which after having distracted us, has ended by occupying a little place in our heart?

When some little trifle upon which we counted to do some work is taken from our office or cell, does not the feeling produced in us reveal that we had a little attachment to it? Ah! if we feel some bitterness, some secret sadness, let us kiss in spirit the hand of God Who, in taking from us this object, has given us the light which shows us the commencement of our wanderings; let us bless the Lord for the care that He takes of removing from our sight and from our possession that which could withdraw us from Him; let us enter into His designs, and not give Him the pain of taking away all; let us labor with a good will, generosity and love, to impoverish ourselves always more and more, and deprive ourselves spontaneously of a crowd of little enjoyments which may still be met with in our path. Let us renounce the satisfaction when it is found in something which obedience enjoins; let us seek in all things only God and His good pleasure, and God will be our All.

CHAPTER EIGHTH.

Of the Oratory and the Divine Worship.

Text: *Let an Oratory be erected as commodious as possible in the midst of the cells, where you are to assemble every morning to hear Mass, when this can be conveniently done.*

FIRST POINT.

There is here question of something of great importance; this expression *let* does not appear to be simply a counsel, but an order. Let us recollect all the faculties of our soul in order to receive this ordinance, to penetrate its sense and to discover its practical meaning.

What is to be done? *Let an Oratory be erected*; that is to say, a place specially destined for prayer and for the divine worship. But what necessity is there for us to have a special place for prayer, since we give ourselves up to this holy exercise night and day in our cell *or near it*, as we have previously seen? Why then this Oratory, since all places, wherever we may be, are, so to speak, transformed into an oratory from the moment we are found there?

It is true that God is so good as to permit us to entertain ourselves with Him at all times and in all places; it is true that He often deigns to communicate Himself to us in the midst of our daily occupations without any regard to the place in which He finds us; it is, however, also true that from time immemorial He has willed that there should be places specially consecrated to His worship, where those who make profession of belonging entirely to Him may repair to praise Him, to supplicate Him, to thank Him for His benefits, to beg of Him new favors, to implore His mercy, and to offer Him Sacrifice, either in private or in common; and it is particularly for common prayer, and to render a public worship to the Divine Majesty, that this has always been necessary.

Although the Lord often spoke to Moses, to the Patriarchs and Prophets, sometimes in one place, some times in another, He ordered, nevertheless, that there should be a place specially consecrated to His worship where He promised to reside more particularly, there to receive the homage of His people, where sacrifices might be offered to Him, where one might consult Him and receive His

oracles. Thus we see that under the Old Law, the Tabernacle was constructed and later on the Temple of Jerusalem, where the Jews were obliged to repair at certain times to honor the Lord by a public worship. So, under the New Law, there were places of reunion for the faithful where they prayed and mutually edified each other, where in common they implored the aid of Heaven and solemnized the Feasts of Religion.

Prayer in solitude is excellent: happy the soul who can, and who knows how to give itself up to it habitually! But solitude, when changed into isolation, can have its abuses and its dangers, by depriving the soul entirely of the society of its brethren and of the advantages promised to common prayer! If our Lord has made known to us that He speaks to the solitary soul, He has also said that He is in the midst of those assembled in His Name; and if it is given us by our manner of life to enjoy the advantages of solitude, it is also given us to participate in those of common prayer. It is for this reason that the Rule directs that there should be *an Oratory* in our Monasteries, where the Holy Sacrifice may be offered, and where souls who have constituted themselves victims for the glory of God may unite to immolate themselves together in union with the Victim, pure and without spot, Who is offered upon the altar for the salvation of the human race.

Let an Oratory be erected in the midst of the cells. It is in this Oratory that Our Lord resides in person; and as His delights are to be with the children of men, He has willed that the place of His abode be found, as far as possible, in the midst of the cells, so as to be more accessible to each one of us. He is in the midst of us to grant us all the graces of which we have continual need; for we are children of Adam, that is to say, poor, weak, ignorant, blind, and always exposed to fall into sin. He has pity on us because we are His fallen children, His degraded work. He loves us still; and this same Heart which so ardently desired to immolate Itself in order to save us, takes pleasure in enclosing Itself in this *Oratory in the midst of the cells*, to finish there by His grace the work of our sanctification. But if He resides with joy and for love of us in the centre of our houses, although so poorly lodged, so badly served, and so annihilated, with what

eagerness, with what gratitude, with what love, should we not go to Him, particularly at the hours when the Rule calls us there to unite ourselves to Him according to His designs and intentions! How inexcusable should we be if we did not go there when this God of love places this *Oratory as conveniently as possible in the midst of the cells!* What goodness on the part of our God! He wishes that His dwelling might be in our midst in order that neither infirmities, old age, occupations, nor even sloth, may allege any pretext for not going there. Oh! how guilty we shall be if on our part we do not generously surmount all the little difficulties which sometimes seem to us sufficient reason for absenting ourselves from Choir! How many souls in the world, in distant countries, among the infidels, would make us blush if we compared their zeal in going to Church notwithstanding the distance, the rigor of the seasons, persecution, and all sorts of perils,—if we compared, I say, their zeal and fervor in braving all these things, with our tepidity and sloth!

Let us then go with diligence to the Choir, where our Divine Saviour wishes to assemble us near Him in order to fill us with His graces and associate us with His immolation for the glory of His Father, and let us do this all the days of our life; these are the words of the Rule: *where you are to assemble every morning to hear Mass.* O child of Carmel! O solitary soul! once during the day shalt thou leave thy solitude, and why? Shall it be to procure for thyself distractions, to seek natural enjoyments among the persons with whom thou art to assemble? Thou dost leave thy solitude as the divine Mary left hers to ascend Calvary, to assist at the death of her Divine Son, to unite her sacrifice to His and to say an admirable “amen” to the consummation of the work of Redemption as she had said at the moment of the Incarnation.

It is in order to assist at the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which is a continuation of the sacrifice of Jesus upon Calvary, that the Rule directs that we should go each day before the holy altar where it is offered, to say from the depths of the heart that “Amen” which unites us to the Church, to the priest, and particularly to Jesus, Priest and Victim.

My weak understanding cannot comprehend all the sublimity of this august Sacrifice, either as a whole or in part;

but it seems to me that I have embraced all when I say "Amen" to all that is said, to all that is done, and particularly to all that passes in the Heart of Jesus, immolating Himself for the glory of His Father, for the expiation of our sins, to thank this Heavenly Father for the graces that He gives us and to obtain for us new blessings. Behold the ends for which the pure Victim offers Himself each day, at each instant of the day, and throughout the entire universe; such are also the ends which we should have in making ourselves victims with Jesus, victims in truth. First, by the desire of the heart while assisting at Mass and afterwards practically, during the whole course of our life; for if there is no moment when Jesus is not in a state of immolation, neither should there be any when our heart and entire being does not immolate itself in union with Him and for the same ends which He proposes to Himself.

It is evident that when our holy Rule enjoins us to assist at the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, it is to be understood that we are to assist there, not only in body but in mind and in heart; thus we are to take care to instruct ourselves by reading and meditating upon all that is capable of helping us to fulfill this duty with perfection. It will be well to meditate upon the institution of this great mystery, transporting ourselves in spirit to the Cenacle where the first Mass was celebrated by Our Lord Himself on the eve of His death, when taking bread into His sacred and adorable Hands, and giving thanks to God His Father, He broke it and gave to His Disciples, saying: "This is My Body."

What a subject of contemplation for our soul, if remaining in this holy place, we occupy ourselves in considering Him Who institutes this mystery, those in favor of whom He institutes it, the ends for which He institutes it, and the inconceivable love of the Heart of Jesus in the institution of this unheard of Sacrifice, of which no one else could ever have thought and which could have been invented only by the love of a God Who, wishing to save all men, has substituted Himself for all the victims offered in

the sacrifices of the Old Law, in order to repair the disorders caused by sin and to re-establish the children of Adam in all their rights to a heavenly inheritance. It is for this end that our amiable Savior offered Himself to His Father; that He descended into the bosom of a Virgin to take, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, a body like to ours; that He appeared and lived upon earth; that He suffered and died upon a Cross; and that, not content with this immolation on Calvary, He has willed to perpetuate it until the end of ages in all parts of the earth, manifesting Himself under another form at each moment, multiplying Himself in a wonderful manner, making of each altar a new Calvary where He immolates Himself and says unceasingly to His Father: "Forgive them for they know not they do." This is then an institution of justice, of mercy and of love which the good Master effected in the Cenacle, and which He consummated upon the Cross.

Again, we may meditate with fruit upon the ends which our Lord proposed to Himself in instituting the Holy Eucharist as a Sacrament and as a Sacrifice. We may take for our text the words which the holy Council of Trent uses to make us understand this: "Jesus Christ has instituted this Divine Mystery for two ends: one, to serve as a nourishment for the soul in quality of a Sacrament, and to maintain, strengthen, repair and renew in it the life of the spirit; the other, that the Church may have a perpetual Sacrifice to offer to God in satisfaction for our offenses, in gratitude and thanksgiving for His benefits, and to obtain from Him a remedy for our weaknesses, and His aid in public and private necessities."

Let us weigh, in the presence of God, expressions so full of meaning, so capable of making us appreciate this great mystery and of inducing us to draw therefrom profit for our soul.

After having considered the love which thus led Him to give Himself to us, to immolate Himself for us, we shall feel the need of giving ourselves to Him and of immolating ourselves with Him for the same ends as those which He has in view. Does it not

concern us to enter into the designs of this good Master?

Have we not need of nourishment to feed our soul and to strengthen it against the assaults which the world, the flesh and the devil make upon it? Do we not need a supernatural life to vivify our works which, without it, would be dead? Have we not need of strength to counteract our natural tendency to evil which can at any moment endanger our salvation, or at least our progress in perfection? It is in the Eucharist, at this source of life, that we can draw the necessary strength.

How can we satisfy for those innumerable offenses which we daily commit and which demand an expiation and a reparation capable of appeasing the anger of God? Now, is not Jesus in the Eucharist the great Victim of the human race?

The Lord fills us with benefits in the order of nature and of grace—dare we think that it is possible to satisfy our duty of gratitude without the aid of the merits of our Lord, and without offering to God, in thanksgiving, the Gift which in His love He has bestowed upon us?

Our weakness exposes us to so many faults and so many spiritual *máladies*; we have so many passions to keep down, so many defects to correct, so many temptations to surmount, so many enemies to combat, so many necessities of all kinds, both of soul and of body, those of our own and those of others; in a word, we find at each step so many obstacles, difficulties and dangers which oblige us to seek aid from on high! But what can our feeble prayers effect? The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass supplies for our powerlessness; it is for this reason that it has been instituted and that the Rule directs that we should assist at it every day.

Let us then assist each day at the Holy Sacrifice with the necessary dispositions; and since it is a continuation of the sacrifice of Jesus dying upon the Cross, let us beg of the Blessed Virgin, St. John and the holy Women to obtain for us the sentiments which animated them at the foot of the Cross on Calvary.

If we had had the happiness of being present with them at that memorable moment, what should ours have been? It is then, if ever, that our heart filled with compunction, passing successively from sorrow to confidence, from confidence to love, from love to confusion, from confusion to thanksgiving, from thanksgiving to the most generous devotedness, should have felt itself inspired with all the energy of its will to perform acts of the most sublime virtues; and our soul, absorbed by this mystery of love, should have wished for nothing else than to suffer through love, to live and die in the exercise of the most pure and most generous love. Should we have allowed ourselves at that moment to seek after enjoyments, or the satisfactions of self-love, at the foot of that Cross where Jesus was agonizing in such a state of suffering and immolation?

It is well then, during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, to transport ourselves in spirit to the foot of the Cross, there to assist at the death of our Divine Savior, occupying our understanding and nourishing our heart with all that our memory can recall of the circumstances which preceded, accompanied, and followed this holy death. And, as the ceremonies of the Mass and the sacred vestments are a memorial of the Passion, by uniting ourselves in spirit to all that is said or done at the holy Altar, which becomes at that moment a new Calvary, it will be easy for us to keep alive within our heart the sentiments which we should wish to have had then, or at least the interior dispositions, whence flow the practice and the habit of solid virtue. There is no question here of sentiment, which is too often sterile in good effects, but of a pure conviction of faith, shown by acts of the will, which are all the more assisted by grace as this conviction is accompanied by more dryness and deprived of all sensible devotion. The meditation of the Passion of our Lord is most capable of exciting within us that good will which makes us love and serve God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our strength.

The three parts of which the Holy Sacrifice of the

Mass is composed, also indicate the principal dispositions which we should bring to it.

The first part, called the Mass of the Catechumens, that is, from the commencement to the Offertory, being a preparation for the Sacrifice properly so called, it is well while following all the ceremonies, to nourish ourselves interiorly with considerations proper to excite in our heart sentiments of confusion, of sorrow for our sins, and of annihilation at the sight of a God loaded with His Cross and ascending Calvary to offer Himself there as a Victim; moreover these sentiments are expressed by the prayers which are said in this part of the Mass. We should also excite in ourselves a respect, a submission of mind and of heart for the Holy Scripture and the Holy Gospel which we hear read, and a lively faith for the truths contained in the Creed.

In the second part, properly called the Mass of Sacrifice, from the Offertory to the Pater Noster, while considering the love of our Savior immolating Himself for us, we should excite in our heart sentiments of annihilation, of love for God, of charity for our neighbor, of devotedness and of zeal. It is principally in this second part that we should dilate our heart, assigning it no other limits than those even of the Heart of Jesus, Whose love embraces all men and causes Him to immolate Himself for all without exception. There, like Him and in union with Him, we should also embrace all classes of society, that multitude of souls spread all over the earth, and offer ourselves as victims for their salvation. We should also descend to those dark prisons where souls are finishing their purification before entering into the heavenly Country. Since Jesus immolates Himself for them, we should also desire with Him to hasten their deliverance by a generous resolution to practise renunciation and mortification, which are as the sacrificial knife of the immolation of ourselves At this moment, in union with our Lord, we should also represent to the Heavenly Father all the needs of the Holy Church, and immolate ourselves for its interests.

Oh! how union with Jesus the Victim, enobles the soul and elevates it above itself, to desire, to implore, and to procure that God may be known, loved, served, praised and glorified in time and in eternity! Again uniting ourselves to the Divine Master, let us say the Pater Noster in which all these desires and all these petitions are comprised.

In the third part of the Mass, from the Pater Noster to the end, our Lord giving Himself as food to the Priest and to the faithful who communicate, asks of us sentiments of humility and of gratitude for so great a benefit—if we have the happiness of receiving this Living Bread—or at least great desires of receiving it if we are deprived of doing so. To supply as much as possible for Sacramental Communion by a Spiritual Communion, we should long for this Eucharistic Bread in order to respond to the desire which our Lord has of giving and communicating Himself to us.

Let us then acquit ourselves of this point of the Rule with exactitude and an interior spirit. Let us prepare our soul by recollection and by vigilance over ourselves before we go to the Holy Mass; let us strive to purify our soul and to dispose ourselves for Holy Communion by the retrenchment of all remembrances, all affection for created things, that we may be filled with holy and ardent desires of uniting ourselves to God; let us read and meditate in order to enlighten ourselves upon the dispositions which we should bring to the Holy Table, and to keep these dispositions alive in our heart. Let us remain in the Choir with respect, modesty and recollection—occupied entirely with this action.

SECOND POINT

The poverty of which we make profession, the strictness of our enclosure, the exactitude and the punctuality required for assisting in Choir, are three sources by means of which the spirit of penance and of mortification can be greatly maintained.

1st. Poverty deprives us of a thousand conveniences and comforts in this place of prayer. At one

time it is the cold which makes us suffer, at another time the heat, again, it is the position which we must maintain; everything there is simple and coarse, there is nothing which can delight the senses; on the contrary, everything by its poor aspect, keeps the soul in abasement, mortification and self-abnegation, recalling to it the necessity of despoiling itself of all kinds of enjoyment, in all things and everywhere.

2nd. The enclosure deprives us of all sight of the Church. No exterior decorations, no pomp or magnificence in the ceremonies, in the ornaments, may be perceived distinctly by our eyes, nothing by which they might be charmed: is not this privation a penance, a mortification and a renunciation?

3rd. Exactitude also furnishes us with means of mortification. To leave everything in order to go to the Choir at the hour prescribed; to observe the regulations; to preserve a religious bearing, a modest and recollected attitude; to banish all remembrances and all preoccupations capable of distracting us: these are indeed exercises of renunciation.

Does not the remembrance of the Passion of our good Savior, the state of immolation in which we behold Him upon the Altar, cry aloud and tell us that we ought to suffer, to renounce ourselves, and to immolate ourselves in union with this Sacred Victim? If we are careful to penetrate into the many mysteries which offer themselves to our consideration during the Mass, we shall certainly find there great lessons of penance and of mortification. How can we think of flattering nature, of treating ourselves well, when we daily see the state to which a God reduces Himself for love of us?

The spirit of prayer is strengthened by the accomplishment of this point of the Rule. First, by the exercise of mortification; then, by the subjects of meditation with which it occupies us, as we have just seen; in fine, by the union of our soul with our Lord in His immolation for the glory of God and the good of souls. The spirit of zeal gains a fresh increase, and at the same time finds a very fruitful exercise in the Holy Sacrifice; for, are not all the needs of

the Church, the souls of sinners, the just of all classes and all ranks, the souls in Purgatory, offered to its ardor and generosity? His love and zeal have made Jesus conceive this divine invention of reproducing Himself, of multiplying Himself, in all places, at all times, that all may find in Him a Restorer, a Mediator, and a Savior. Ah, well! if, by uniting ourselves to Him, we can draw from His Heart this love and this zeal, they will suggest to us also means of multiplying ourselves, of transporting ourselves in spirit everywhere, wherever there are souls in suffering or in peril, placing ourselves with our Lord between God and the sinner to receive in their stead the blows of His justice, and to obtain mercy for them. With the aid of grace we shall discover a thousand means of practising renunciation; for exercising charity towards those who surround us, by our prayers, our words, our example, our acts of zeal and devotedness, as far as circumstances permit. St. Paul says that charity is ingenious; true zeal is so likewise: it does not allow itself to be carried away, it waits, it prays, it expands, it consumes itself in silence, in union with our Lord. Such is the zeal we should draw from the Holy Mass.

THIRD POINT

Examples

As from time immemorial there have been places destined for common prayer and specially consecrated to the Divine Worship, so also, from time immemorial we find examples of the fidelity, of the fervor and the exactitude with which we are to repair at stated times to the House of God. Setting aside those examples of the Old Law which all know and admire in Moses, David, Solomon, etc., let us draw nearer to our own era, and particularly to our own Religious family, in order that the models proposed may be better understood.

Let us not pass over in silence the fidelity of Jesus, of Mary, and of Joseph, in repairing to the Temple at the times prescribed by the Law. Their distance of residence from Jerusalem, the rigor of the seasons,

the difficulty of the journey, their great poverty: nothing of this appeared to them a sufficient motive for dispensing themselves. Jesus, Who had come to substitute for the Jewish Worship, a worship still more excellent, was not bound to submit to a law which He was going to abolish; but the hour having not yet come, He observed this law, He went to the Temple, where He filled with admiration all those who were witnesses of the manner in which He comported Himself, of the modesty of His demeanor, and the recollection of His prayer. And if we ask why He kept Himself thus bound by the law, although so young a child, let us listen to the reply which He Himself has given us: "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" Such should also be our occupation in the holy place, after the example of our good Master. We have previously seen in Chapter V an example which He gave us of His zeal for the honor and respect due to the House of God, when He drove the sellers from the Temple,—these being figures of the distractions with which we are preoccupied in the place of prayer.

Mary, repairing to the Temple with exactitude, modesty, and a spirit of faith, is also our model. Mary at the foot of the Cross, drawing from an abyss of sorrow new strength and a more heroic devotedness, reveals to us the dispositions which we ought to bring to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and the fruit we ought to draw from it.

The story, so well known, of that young page of the Queen of Portugal who was saved from certain death by having assisted at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass; and that of the traveler preserved from lightning because he had heard Mass, are very proper to make us understand how our Lord blesses our fidelity in assisting at this Divine Sacrifice, and how many graces we lose, through our own fault, when we miss it without legitimate reasons.

Our Holy Mother St. Teresa relates that a gentleman dying after having left means for the establishment of a Monastery of the Reform, she received a revelation that the soul of the founder would remain

in Purgatory until the first Mass should be said in the Church of that Convent. She then hastened to have it finished; and as soon as the Holy Sacrifice had been offered there, this soul appeared to her to testify his gratitude for having just then been delivered from Purgatory.

We read in the works of this great Saint that it was always a great consolation to her to erect new Temples to God, where fervent souls could unite to praise, glorify and supplicate Him. We find in the history of her Foundations an example and proof of this. When she arrived at Medina to establish a Monastery there, she found the house, to her great surprise, in a state of delapidation and uncleanness, very capable of disconcerting her if she had not been animated by a zeal and a courage which were proof against all trial. The night had already set in. On one side there were old walls half in ruins; on the other, heaps of earth and rubbish. The entrance door needed adjustment; the walls were not plastered; the roof resembled an immense spider web, and the floor was covered with dust and dirt; and this was the place in which there was question of having Mass celebrated and the Blessed Sacrament reserved. Her piety and zeal made her forget the fatigues of a painful journey and disregard those which she must still endure in order to put this place in a proper condition. They immediately set to work, the Saint animating all her companions by her example: some among them removed the earth, others the stones, some cleaned and swept, others hung the tapestry, dressed and prepared the altar; in a word, they worked so well and with such diligence during that night that at day-break nothing was wanting for Mass to be said. A small bell was hung up to call the faithful, who came in great numbers and wondered to see so sudden a transformation. Reverend Father Anthony, Prior of the Carmelite Fathers, celebrated the first Mass, which the Nuns heard through the chinks in the door of a room where they had retired so as not to be seen. After Mass the Blessed Sacrament was placed in a little Tabernacle where our Divine Saviour was well

pleased to remain for the consolation of His faithful Spouses.

The Chronicles of our holy Order are filled with edifying examples of our Fathers and our Mothers who were the admiration of men and who rejoiced the Angels by their exactitude in repairing to the Choir and by the dispositions which they brought to it. We see poor, infirm Religious making every effort to get there, starting a long time before the hour in order to reach there at the same time as the Community. We see them clinging to the wall, not being able to walk without a support, and surmounting generously all that nature could suggest as reasons for dispensing themselves from going to Choir, so much did they appreciate the advantage of assisting at Mass and at prayer in common! To raise their eyes in Choir through levity, appeared to them a crime; to remain there in a manner ever so little careless, to seek their ease, to occupy their mind with wandering thoughts, would have been for these fervent souls the gravest of faults.

Our Holy Father St. John of the Cross celebrated the holy Mysteries with so much faith and so much fervor that his soul often entered into an ecstasy, his body becoming immovable and all natural operations suspended. One day as he was saying Mass in a Monastery of the Order, and had communicated under the species of bread, he remained entirely ravished in God, holding the Chalice between his hands, and incapable of continuing the Holy Sacrifice. It was then that a lady among the faithful who knew the eminent virtue of the holy Religious, cried out: "Call for the Angels to finish the Mass—they alone are capable of acquitting themselves of this duty with as much devotion as this holy man, who no longer appears in a state to do it." The Fathers, warned of what had happened, went immediately to him, and having caused him to return to himself, one of them assisted him to finish the Mass and conducted him back to the sacristy entirely penetrated with love and devotion.

Our Blessed Sister Mary of the Incarnation had a

great zeal for all that concerned the Divine Worship. While yet in the world she contributed as much as lay in her power to the decoration of Churches and of altars; she showed in the Church an exemplary modesty and occupied herself only with God; the sacred ceremonies made her enter into a profound recollection; and when she became a Religious, she regarded as a punishment from God the impossibility of taking part in the Divine Worship, in which her maladies sometimes placed her. "Alas!" said she, "I do not merit to be united with my Sisters in prayer." Were not the Saints of the same nature as ours? Let us imitate them, and we shall have a share in their glory during all eternity.

FOURTH POINT

Examen

Alone with God and my conscience, I am going to compare my conduct with the perfection which I have discovered for the practice of this point of the Rule.

Have I appreciated the happiness of having an *Oratory in the midst of the cells*, where I can daily assist at the Holy Mass and participate in the Divine Mysteries with the holy souls who are assembled there? Ah! if I had appreciated this happiness, should I have been so negligent in going to Choir, so tepid in surmounting the difficulties or the obstacles raised by my indifference, my sloth, and my sensuality? On the contrary, I would have forced myself to go there with recollection, with a spirit of faith, a good will, and all suitable dispositions. Is it not true that too often what seemed to me at first a legitimate reason for a dispensation, afterwards appeared to be, and was in reality, only a vain pretext and a want of generosity? Have charity and obedience been always the real motives which have made me miss Mass, or a part of it? Was it not rather too great an ardor for occupations which were according to my taste, or too great an eagerness to finish a work with which I was charged? Has not my want of exactitude proceeded from a want of foresight and of order in my actions, or even from sloth

which made me attach too much importance to a slight indisposition? Was it not also from a want of not having examined and prayed before asking for a dispensation?

But if I go regularly to the Choir, do I recollect myself on the way there, dismissing all idle thoughts, all remembrance of created things? Do I observe exactly the regulations and the ceremonies? Do I not allow my eyes to wander about, and my mind, from a want of vigilance, to be occupied with what takes place in the Choir, the going and coming of the Sisters? Is it for this that Jesus calls me to that holy place?

Do I unite myself with the Priest during Mass? Do I unite and identify myself with our Lord immolating Himself as He did on Calvary for the glory of His Father? Do I pray for the needs of the Church, for the conversion of sinners, for all souls on earth, for those who suffer in Purgatory? What graces might I not have obtained for myself and for others and of which I have been deprived through my own fault!

With what tepidity have I not assisted at this August Sacrifice! Upon seeing my carelessness, either in going to or assisting at it, who would think that I am a disciple and a spouse of this God Who has made Himself a Victim for love of us?

Have I left all occupation at the first sound of the bell calling me to the Holy Sacrifice? If I have been unfaithful in this, have I not gone to the Choir with a distracted mind, with an unbecoming precipitation, contrary to the gravity and modesty of a soul religiously occupied with the thought of the great action which she is going to perform? The Mass is about to begin or has begun: it matters little; my mind wanders, here and there; I should wish, however to fix its attention, but this duty, which should have been done before entering Choir, becomes difficult and often impossible. The awful moment approaches: Jesus is going to immolate Himself, and I again try to recall the faculties of my soul! or fatigued by my useless efforts, remain in an apathetic

repose. It is time to go to the Holy Table: I have scarcely thought of it! Who is He Who comes to me? Who am I to deserve so great a happiness? What gifts does He bring Who gives Himself to me? What does He require in return for such a favor? Ah! all these questions have not been profoundly weighed; my will is languid; it sleeps at a moment when these considerations ought to give it an ardor and an energy entirely new in order to fly in the way of perfection. My imagination, profiting by the drowsiness of the faculties of my soul, causes disorder in my thoughts by creating phantoms which cast me into a state of discouragement. Then all is despaired of: I see what I should do, what I should be, what I am not; the evil appears to me irreparable, I see in it the seal of reprobation. I approach this holy action only with trouble, inquietude, desolation, discouragement, impatience, and murmuring; so when I leave it I am more tepid, more indifferent to good, more negligent in regard to my duties than I was previously. My whole conduct suffers from neglecting this act, or accomplishing it badly through want of preparation, of vigilance and of good dispositions; the contradictions, the pains, the humiliations sown along my way throughout the day, are accepted with impatience and instead of raising me to God withdraw me still further from Him. If, on the contrary, I had prepared myself before going to Choir, if I had united myself to the Divine Victim, begging through the merits of His Blood the generosity, the devotedness, the charity and all the virtues required of me in return for His immolation upon the Altar, foreseeing the occupations in which I should have to immolate something of the "ego," and taking practical resolutions, my day should have been less sterile in virtue, trying occasions would not have taken me by surprise, and I should have entered more perfectly into the ways of God by a conduct truly religious.

But what could have been the source of this dissipation and of the miseries which I have just pointed out? Could it not be a want of remote preparation, which consists in the habit of humility, of simplicity

and of recollection: three virtues capable of destroying the principal vices which are an obstacle to my union with God in prayer? Am I habitually convinced that I am nothing, that I can do nothing and that I know nothing? Does this conviction keep me in a state of annihilation before God and before men, without casting me into discouragement, sadness, or ill-humor? Does it render me meek and humble of heart in my whole conduct and in my intercourse with my neighbor? Am I satisfied that others believe me to be such as I see myself in truth? Have I not deluded myself to the point of believing that I am in humble dispositions, when my soul is upset by a word, a gesture, or a proceeding which touches ever so little my self-love; when I reason upon what has thus upset me, seeking an occasion to justify myself and dwelling upon my sad thoughts which keep up in me a natural aversion to someone? Can I believe that I have this humility of heart when I still hold to certain little points of honor, remarking a little preference, a manifestation of confidence or of affection shown to another rather than to myself; when I become formal and consider myself offended? What distractions in prayer caused by this want of humility!

Vainly shall I struggle against distractions during Mass and my other spiritual exercises, if I take no care to destroy the cause of it—that depth of self-love which is within me and which I ought to combat without relaxation.

Let us see in the second place, if a want of simplicity does not deprive me of the profit that I ought to draw from prayer. Is my conduct always simple and upright, without returns upon myself, without dissimulation, without suspicion, without apprehension, without attachment to my own views and my own judgment, without obstinacy? Do I go to my Superiors as to God Himself? Alas! what reasonings, what human considerations, what little windings in order to conciliate their benevolence, their esteem, to avoid a refusal, a reproach, a humiliation? Am I always the same in and out of their presence? If I wish to

gather any real profit from my spiritual exercises, it is necessary that I should have God only in view, seek only His good pleasure and receive all things as coming from His Hand.

Lastly, let us see if my recollection is habitual. Are my senses mortified? Are not the faculties of my soul occupied with a thousand follies? Do I not by means of my imagination converse with everybody in the world except God? Am I not curious, desiring to hear all the news? Am I not always found occupied in breaking silence and in distracting myself? Should I be astonished if at Mass I experienced so much difficulty in recollecting myself, when I take there with me so many subjects of distraction?

Let us then, O my soul, take a firm resolution of working seriously to become humble, simple and recollected, so that thus destroying the cause of my tepidity and distractions, I shall henceforth assist at Mass and communicate with the requisite dispositions, and bring back from the adorable Sacrifice the fruits which God there prepares for me for His own greater glory.

CHAPTER NINTH.

Of Chapter and of the Correction of the Religious.

Text: *On Sundays and other days if necessary, you shall treat of the observance of the Order and the salvation of souls, when the faults and defects, (if any there be) of the Religious, shall also be charitably corrected.*

FIRST POINT.

Our weakness is so great that the holiest things make but a slight and passing impression upon us; on the other hand, we have so great a tendency to descend, that if we are not incited to rise higher and if these impulses towards good are not reiterated, we very soon forget our duties and continue to retrograde until we fall into the abyss.

This point of the Rule, in ordaining that the Conventual Chapter should be held once a week, keeps us on the alert, renews our good impressions, recalls our obligations, repairs our faults and cautions us against new falls. See then the measure of our strength to sustain ourselves in good: eight days! Eight days only suffice to necessitate a renewal of zeal for regular observance; . . . eight days—and the need is felt of a new supply of strength; . . . eight days—and we begin to forget what we are and what we ought to be; . . . eight days—and it is necessary to repeat to ourselves: “Bernard, Bernard, for what hast thou come hither?”

God has bestowed upon us a great gift in giving us a Rule which leads us back to order when we go astray; a Rule which prevents us from falling, or which gives us the means of rising from our falls; a Rule which recalls our obligations and excites us to accomplish them.

The holding of Chapter is necessary; our own experience makes this sufficiently clear to us; there we treat of *the observance of the Order and the salvation of souls*, and there faults are corrected. What is more important for the general good of the Community, and for the particular good of each soul!

All those who embrace any profession whatsoever, study the rules and duties of that profession; they listen to the instructions of those whom they regard as their masters; they reflect upon them, and put them into prac-

tice; they endeavor to become skilled, and wish to be aided therein by the example, the advice and the discoveries of others; they assemble on certain days in order to encourage and mutually enlighten one another, to seek light upon certain questions, to discuss difficult points, and to take the means of acquiring a greater perfection. Should we then consider it as an extraordinary thing that the religious profession has, at specified times, reunions where souls may find light, encouragement and strength to advance in perfection?

If religious perfection consists in *the observance of the Order*, is it not necessary that on certain days exhortations should be made and advice given, in order to remind us of our Rules, to develop their meaning for us, and to teach us how to practise them?

In order the better to appreciate the necessity and the advantages of Chapter, let us regard it from three different points of view:

I. Our own needs. II. The sanctity of the Rules. III. The authority of the one who presides and exhorts.

I. If we consider our own needs, how greatly shall we appreciate so efficacious a means of remedying, first, our ignorance; secondly, our weakness; thirdly, our inconsistency: the triple cause of all our miseries and all our failings!

First, as children of Adam, conceived in sin, we are subject to the effects of sin and consequently to ignorance. In effect, what did we know when we were born? We were ignorant even of our own existence. The little knowledge which we afterwards succeeded in acquiring, at the price of so much study, fatigue and labor, evidently proves that we know nothing in comparison to that of which we are ignorant. The more we study, the more confirmed are we in this conviction. Is not our eagerness to learn only a new proof of our ignorance? What do we know of ourselves? What do we know of God, of His essence, of His attributes, of His perfections? What do we know of His works, in the natural and in the supernatural order? What do we know of His thoughts, of His designs?

What is the extent of our knowledge of the law of God, of the Evangelical Counsels, as to the letter or the spirit? Have we a perfect understanding of them? Do

we know the essence, the excellence, the advantages of the Christian, of the moral and of the religious virtues? Do we know the means of acquiring them, of perfecting ourselves in them? How far does our understanding of the vows of Religion, of our Rules, and of the spirit of our Institute extend? Let us acknowledge that the most certain science which we possess is that of our ignorance; and the most learned is he who knows best how to recognize this. The little knowledge which we possess, have we drawn it from ourselves? Has it not been communicated to us through means of another, or by the intervention of grace?

Let us then, return to this conclusion, that our ignorance necessitates the exhortations at Chapter, or elsewhere, which instruct us, stimulate us, and aid us to tend to the perfection which God desires of us, to procure His glory and to effect our salvation.

Secondly, our weakness necessitates this practice of Religion. As we have already said, sin has degraded us; we are no longer that Adam as he came forth from the Hand of the All-powerful God, the image and likeness of his Creator, a brilliant reflection of His attributes, displaying His perfections to the earth, governing all with strength and wisdom according to the designs of God. Alas! we that poor unrecognizable Adam hidden under the fig tree, ashamed to show himself, and against whom all creation revolts because he himself has disobeyed his God. All the strength which man possessed for good has given place to a lamentable weakness which inclines him towards evil; enemies attack us on all sides: some are without, others within us. The devil, the world and the flesh profiting by our tendency to evil and allying themselves with our inferior nature destroy the little good-will which remains to us, if powerful auxiliaries do not aid us to triumph over them. We walk on the border of deep precipices where we meet with a thousand occasions to make us fall; without aid we are powerless to defend and withdraw ourselves from so many perils.

From what source then may we draw the necessary strength? Have we not had the sad experience that in placing confidence in ourselves we have met with nothing but weakness? And, when we have fallen, who has extended to us a helping hand? Was it not God, either di-

rectly or by means of one of His creatures? How can we count upon our own strength, when we daily experience that a nothing, a look, a word, casts us into a state of deplorable discouragement? Our memory is subject to forgetfulness, even of things the most important; our mind is fatigued by any sustained application; our heart allows itself to be taken captive by a little flattery; and our foolish, deceitful imagination, the creator of vain phantoms, does it not often reign as sovereign over us? How great then is our weakness!

Our Holy Rule comes to our aid by means of Chapter, where we treat of *the observance of the Order and the salvation of souls*. There, we are strengthened by the consideration of the immense resources to be found in God; there, are disclosed to us the artifices, the strength, the snares of our enemies, and, there also, we are furnished with arms for overcoming them; there, we are shown the way in which we should walk, the virtues which must be practised in order to attain the end of our holy vocation; examples are cited which revive our drooping courage; then our good Savior, through the means of her who presides, makes us hear some consoling words which are a comfort to us if we are overwhelmed under the weight of our miseries; in a word, if we go to Chapter cast down and discouraged, we come from it renewed, fortified and animated with generous ardor.

Thirdly, we find in Chapter a remedy for our inconstancy. At every age and in all circumstances, a child of Adam shows himself inconstant: unhappy tendency which unceasingly turns him away from his end. We are always full of desires. If we attain the object of our desires, it ceases to please us and we wish for what we have not. That which delighted us yesterday, displeases us today. With us impressions are but passing; they must be continually renewed. As a consequence of this inconstancy our resolutions and our projects remain without effect; that which today causes in us a strong impulse, will in a few days find and leave us unmoved.

What faults, what miseries, and what infidelities flow from this inconstancy! Of how many graces we deprive ourselves! How many virtues we neglect to practise! How many good works we omit! The devil is too cunning not to profit by this love which we have for novelty,

and so he seduces and deceives us with a thousand illusions: *more (Page)*

Now, how can we remedy this defect which is so prejudicial to us? Again, the Rule provides for this by means of Chapter; the penances, the exhortation and the corrections aid us to practise our holy observances with perseverance; then, too, they favor, in some sort, this inclination by presenting to us the same truths under an aspect the novelty of which pleases and encourages us. There are so many beauties hidden in the law of God, in our Rules, in all that constitutes the Religious Life! Some one of these is always disclosed to us in the exhortations, and we are drawn, notwithstanding ourselves, to the practice of what is shown to us under so attractive an aspect.

Do the regular exercises, obedience, humility, weary us? God permits that they are shown to us from a point of view altogether new which leads us to love them and to practise them with new ardor; and these reunions of Chapter, which might perhaps become burdensome on account of their frequency, become agreeable by means of the new things which are there shown us and which maintain us in the love of the Order and in the practice of the religious virtues.

II. To augment the esteem we have for this observance, let us look at it from a second point of view, that of the sanctity of the Rules which are the object of monastic exhortations, since the Rule says: *Where you shall treat of the observance of the Order and the salvation of souls.* It is then of regular observance and of all that constitutes religious perfection, that we are spoken to in Chapter. What can be of more importance to us, since these observances will form the matter of our judgment?

We may here recall what we have said in the first Meditation concerning the sanctity of our Rules; and after having convinced ourselves anew that they are holy in their principle and in their effects, let us bless our Lord for having given us, in Chapter, a means of knowing them better, of loving them more and of practising them perfectly; for they will conduct us so much the more efficaciously to sanctity in proportion as we show greater fidelity in observing them to their full extent, not only in their principal points, but also in those which appear of the least importance.

III. Lastly, a third motive for the esteem we ought to have for Chapter and for the exhortations which we there hear, is the authority of the person who presides and exhorts. She holds her authority from God, Whom she represents in our midst. She is the instrument which manifests to us His Will; she receives lights and particular graces that she may recognize this Divine Will and present it under an agreeable form to those who hear her. She speaks under the influence of grace, according to the general needs of the Community, and the particular need of each member. God is there, God presides, God speaks; He applies the law by developing the sense through means of the person to whom He has said when constituting her in charge: "He who hears you, hears Me". Whatever may be the individual qualities of the person who has received this mission, faith should make us recognize in her, God and His Will. The Eternal Word has declared this, as we have just seen; and moreover, He has also taught us that we should do what they who are seated on the Chair of Moses tell us to do, without, however, imitating their conduct if this conduct is in opposition to what they teach us. We should, then, consider in those who instruct and exhort us, only the divine mission which they have received.

That they have received this mission is too evident to require proofs to convince us of it. If it be the Prioress, her canonical election, the authority which she has received from our chief Ecclesiastical Superiors, does not permit us to doubt it; if it is another Sister, she acts only by order of the Prioress, who communicates to her, for the time being, her own authority. If it is a Minister of God who gives us an instruction at the grate, he has also a divine mission, since Ecclesiastical authority confers it upon him, and since the Prioress cannot call in a Priest who has not received it.

The three considerations which we have just made, indicate the dispositions which we should bring to Chapter and with which we should listen to the exhortations addressed to us. The knowledge of our ignorance, of our weakness, and of our inconstancy, will make us go there with humility, with an intimate conviction of our misery, and of the need which we have of the helps there offered us. The knowledge of the sanctity of the Rules will ex-

cite in us a great hunger for this nourishment, and a good will to become regular in all things. The conviction that the person who speaks to us is clothed with the authority of God will cause us to receive her words with respect, submission and humility. The spirit of faith will silence all reasonings within us, will repress all complaints, all murmuring, all human considerations, and will leave to our soul the entire use of its faculties, in order to accept and to profit by the designs and the Will of God which are communicated to us through this channel. Oh! how many graces are granted to the soul who hears the word of God in these dispositions! Light, strength, efficacious resolutions, practical application—all that ought to facilitate for her the acquisition of sanctity by *the observance of the Order*.

When the faults and defects, (if any there be) of the Religious, shall also be charitably corrected.

Besides the exhortations which are so advantageous to us, there is yet another point of great importance: the correction of faults. The interests of God, those of the Order, and our own, require this correction.

1st.—The interests of God require that faults should be corrected, punished and repaired; . . . His glory, His justice, His mercy, all are here concerned.

God, in choosing us to form part of His people, has given us laws, the observance of which are to procure His glory while effecting our salvation. Does it not concern the glory of a great monarch that his laws be observed, his plans followed, his least orders executed with fidelity and love by his subjects, of whom he only wishes their happiness? Does it not concern the glory of an artist that all he makes use of in the execution of his work be suitable to attain the end he has in view? Why should it be otherwise with the plans, the laws, the designs of God, where all is studied, drawn up, arranged and regulated with so much wisdom and perfection? If then, a single infraction attacks the glory of God, should it not be repaired as soon as possible? Oh! if we could understand the glory that we may procure Him by our fidelity in observing the beautiful order which He has established, we would always be on the alert to discover the wish of this good Father, our heart disposed to conform to it and

our hands ready to execute it; and we would have no repose until we had made full reparation.

The justice of God requires the correction of faults. As Creator, Father and Sovereign Master, He has an incontestable right over all creatures, to govern them as it shall seem to Him good; and if the creature goes against His laws, and disturbs the order and economy of His designs, justice requires that reparation be made, and the guilty creature punished for its rebellion, that it might know that its Master will always be Master, that He will maintain the order which He has established despite all that can oppose it, that this order cannot be disturbed with impunity; because His justice wills that all be in its proper place, that the Master be Master and the servant be servant. Does not human justice place side by side with its laws the punishments to be inflicted for their infraction?

Finally, Divine Mercy wills that our faults be corrected and repaired upon this earth, by accusation of them and satisfaction for them. Divine Justice will always have time to exercise its power, the whole of eternity being at its disposal; and if here below we are not willing to prevent it, in the other life it will act whether we wish it or not. But our God is so good, His love for us is so great, that He has recourse to His justice only after having exhausted His mercy.

He warns us that if we recognize our faults, if we do penance with an humble and contrite heart, He will pardon us and receive us into the arms of His mercy, as the prodigal child was received by his father when he returned to him. He wishes us to know that a light penance here below disarms His justice; and that a fault for which we may merit a great chastisement after death will be effaced now, if we accuse ourselves of it with sincere repentance and make satisfaction according to our power, conformably to the laws of the Church and of the Order of which we are members. Ah, how good God is!

It is true that He sometimes menaces the impenitent sinner with the thunderbolts of His anger and with eternal flames; but this is done only to bring him back to Himself and to engage him to have recourse to His mercy. Far more frequently does He show His Heart open to pardon the repentant sinner. There is nothing of which

He speaks so often, and in terms so varied, as of His mercy. He presses us in every way to enter into ourselves, to confess and repair our faults while there is yet time, because His paternal Heart wishes to pardon us, and the time of His mercy is limited to our life here below. He wishes to see His children always pure and spotless, that His Eyes may rest upon them with complacency. It is for this reason that He demands reparation for the faults that human weakness causes us to commit daily. If He chastises us now, it is through love, it is in order not to be constrained to do it later on with all the rigor of His justice.

Ah! let us satisfy this merciful Heart; let us go to Chapter with a will well disposed, so as to glorify God, satisfy His justice, and particularly, to enter into His designs of mercy and of love.

2nd.—It also concerns the Order, our Mother, that faults be corrected and repaired—this regards her honor. A Mother is honored by her children when they are submissive to her, when they show respect for all that concerns her, and when they give her consolation and assistance in her trials and necessities.

This submission is manifested in the execution of her orders, of her advice, and of her counsels. It is shown even more by the manner in which her children receive corrections and the penances imposed for faults committed,—and this is inevitable, for the faults will be committed; but thanks to the reparation which we make for them, the honor and glory of the Order is not tarnished. The Saints, who have left us their opinion on the above subject, all say that faults when recognized and repaired do not tarnish the glory of the Order but, on the contrary, enhance it. They also teach us that impunity dishonors this good Mother. Let us then honor her by our filial submission in the observance of all that she orders, and by the humble and cordial acceptation of the penances which our failings merit.

This respect is manifested by our zeal for the accomplishment of all our Rules; for when we respect our Mother we respect all that comes from her, we never permit ourselves to criticise in the least what she judges proper to order or to do. We should then respect every-

thing in Religion because everything in it is the expression of the Will of God.

What is it to respect a regulation? It is to observe it with exactitude and great fidelity and to repair as soon as possible the failings of which we have rendered ourselves guilty. If my Mother tells me to pray, to labor, to keep silence, to observe modesty in my deportment, having the eyes lowered, etc., I testify my respect for her words by doing exactly what she prescribes, persuaded that she will never command me to do anything which is not most proper, and for my greater perfection; and if human frailty causes me to be guilty of some infidelity, my respect for the will of my Mother leads me to throw myself at her feet to beg for pardon and penance with true repentance and a sincere resolution of doing better in the future. Moreover, if anyone else disapproves of or neglects to do what my Mother wishes, my respect for her leads me to bring back this rebellious soul to the path of duty and submission; and if she persists in her insubordination, I feel the need of avenging the honor of my Mother by the punishment and the reparation required for the fault committed.

My Mother, the Order, has also her sufferings, her trials, and her necessities: her children honor her by their eagerness to console her, by their devotedness in assisting and aiding her. The Rules, observed in their integrity and maintained in their vigor, form the glory of the Order, her strength and her riches: to fail in discipline is to attack this glory and to diminish this strength and these riches. Regular discipline is her wall of defense, and the faults which we commit against it are so many breaches by which the devil and the spirit of the world are introduced into her house, there to pillage, to ravage and destroy her, if we are not careful. This then is for the Order a cause of sorrow which we remedy by the accusation and correction of faults in Chapter. There we console our Mother for the sorrow we have caused her by our irregularities, there we repair the breaches made in her walls of defense and we enrich her anew by our repentance and good will.

3rd.—We have said, in fine, that after the interests of God and those of Religion, our own interest also makes it a duty for us to maintain the religious spirit by means

of corrections made in Chapter. In effect, what is there more important for us than to know and to follow the way that leads us to God, out of which there is neither glory, nor riches, nor happiness to be found? This way is the practice of regular discipline. To fail in the Rule is to go astray from the way. What greater service can we render to a traveller who has gone astray than to warn him of it and bring him back to the right road? Is not he who falls and wounds himself on his way happy to find a helping hand to aid him to rise and to dress his wound? The fidelity with which we accomplish the Will of God is the source of our happiness upon earth, and our felicity and glory in Heaven; now, the Will of God is found in our holy observances: the correction of faults in Chapter is then very advantageous to maintain us in this observance, or lead us back to it if we have strayed. Is it not true that we receive there suggestions which give us a new impulse towards good? Is it not true that when a fault has neither been recognized nor punished we very soon commit another, and that thus a new habit is very easily contradicted? But, on the contrary, does not a fault corrected and punished impress upon us a great horror for that fault? Does it not inspire us with an efficacious resolution not to commit it again?

Ah! let us bless a thousand and a thousand times the God Who gives us so excellent a means of repairing our past faults, of guarding against future falls, and thus assuring us of eternal happiness if we use this means with humility, simplicity and good will.

But let us not forget that the Order does not correct us as servants and slaves: the Rule wishes it to be done *with charity*, as a Mother corrects her children. It is always with love and through a pure motive of charity, and not through animosity nor passion, that it seeks to discover and to correct what might be capable of injuring the interests of God, those of the Order and our own. It is charity which gives to those who correct and punish a sentiment of compassion for the soul who has fallen, a sincere desire of doing her good, a care to observe the time, the words, the means most proper to lead to happy results. It is charity which waits for the favorable moment to make the correction, according to the recommendation of our holy Constitutions which say that we should wait

until anger is appeased before making the correction which a fault merits. It is charity which warns us and which aids us. Let us then, on our part, repay those who render us so great a service; let us love them, let us make up to them by our docility for the pain which it has cost them to fulfill this duty; let us even render it easy for them by the humility and good will with which we receive their warnings and their corrections; for, as it is painful to correct souls badly disposed, so it is consoling to see the profit which an humble and docile soul derives from corrections. Let us always pray for those who have care of admonishing us and particularly at the time when they are reprimanding us; let us consider only the good that they wish to do us, and which they really do us, even when we are not guilty of the accusation. Let us not stop at the person who reproves us, at her good qualities or her defects: let us not seek to sound her heart trying to discover some aversion or prejudice in our regard which could have dictated her reproof. May God preserve us from such a disorder! Let us remember only that she accomplishes towards us an act of pure charity which requires of us in return gratitude, humility and love.

Let us now see the obligations of the Monitress for acquitting herself of this duty according to the spirit of the Rule. Our holy Constitutions thus explain them: "The Zelatrix should notice the faults which come under her observation and name them to the Prioress who can sometimes empower her, though a junior Sister, to admonish publicly those who may be in fault, even her seniors, in order that they may acquire humility. They are not to make any reply when admonished, even though they may be innocent of the faults imputed to them".

Let us weigh the words of the Constitutions: "she should", an expression which indicates a duty to be fulfilled. What is this duty? "To notice the faults which come under her observation." Let us here remark that it does not say to act as a spy, to suspect, to search out, to reprehend, to correct. No, such is not the duty of the Monitress; she is only obliged to notice, so to say, and make known, whatever comes in her way that is contrary to the regular discipline of the Order, or to the practice of the religious virtues. She is not obliged to leave her cell expressly, to go here and there in order to notice the

faults which may be committed; but only to remark "the faults which come under her observation" according as occasion presents itself. Thus, when obliged to go through the house or into the garden, if she remarks faults against silence, religious modesty, or the like, she is bound to observe and take note of them, for this is according to the Constitutions. She should not, in such cases, close her eyes under pretext of not meddling with the faults of others, or through indifference to the good of the Order; she should remember that it is a duty of charity and of obedience, and that, in this spirit, she should notice the faults and mention them simply to the Prioress, without comment, without bitterness, without exaggeration; again, they should be manifest faults which cannot give place to any interpretation subject to error. She should not make the accusation of anything doubtful, nor of a slight fault committed only once. Finally, after declaring the fault in all truth, exactitude and simplicity, she should conform to what the Prioress judges proper to ordain.

"Who can sometimes empower her, though a junior Sister, to admonish publicly those who may be in fault." In this case, she should charitably aid those who have failed, at the time and in the terms which the Prioress judges suitable. This point of the Rule and of the Constitutions also shows us that we should avoid noticing the faults of others when we are not charged with this duty, and also reporting them through a certain spirit of inquietude and suspicion, or through some displeasure or secret aversion. For, if the Monitress ought to avoid doing this, with how much stronger reason should they do so who have not the office; if the Monitress should not admonish the Sisters without having received the express order of the Prioress, with much stronger reason should the others not meddle here; if the Monitress should keep to the formula which the Prioress has judged proper to prescribe to her in order to admonish in charity, with much stronger reason should those who have not this duty be on their guard not to address any reprimand, nor any reproach to anyone, at any time, in any place, or in any manner whatsoever; if the Monitress ought to humble herself and recognize herself as more culpable than those whom she in charity admonishes, to what are they not obliged who have not this office? Our holy Constitu-

tions say formally that "no one should reprimand another" and that since there is a zelatrix, they should not notice the faults of others but endeavor to amend their own.

SECOND POINT.

The obligation of entering into ourselves every eight days to examine the faults which we have committed and to manifest them to the Community, in order to receive a correction and a penance for them, ought to maintain within us the spirit of mortification. But this is not all: if it happens that we forget our faults, or if we do not accuse ourselves of them publicly, the Monitress who has taken notice of them will point them out to us and discover them to the Community. Have we taken some satisfaction by speaking without necessity, by failing in religious modesty, etc., well, this pleasure which is contrary to regular observance, is going to be pointed out in order to procure for us at Chapter a good humiliation, then a correction and a penance; whence it follows that, to avoid this triple consequence, we feel obliged to watch over ourselves during the following week and to deprive ourselves of these little liberties under pain of seeing the correction and the penance doubled in case of a relapse. It is necessary then that we be punished severely and that we hold ourselves continually on our guard to keep within the regular discipline, and this accustoms us to mortification and facilitates for us the means of acquiring its spirit. All that we hear and see at Chapter is capable of maintaining us in this spirit: the exhortations, the corrections, and the good example.

All that keeps up the spirit of penance nourishes likewise a spirit of prayer and of union with God. At Chapter we are in a state of humiliation; the thought of our powerlessness makes us feel the need of having recourse to God to beg His grace, and we know that God communicates and unites Himself to an humble soul; we hear advice and instructions which furnish us with very fruitful subjects for prayer. It is evident that the spirit of prayer is strengthened there, for these reunions of Chapter tend to make us contract the habits of virtue and of religious practices which have the effect of despoiling us of all things, of making us come out of ourselves to lose our-

selves in God, by making us walk continually according to His holy Will.

It is thus that our soul, raising itself above all that is not God, is rendered capable of acquiring the spirit of zeal by losing, so to speak, the sight of its personal interests. The interests of God alone occupy it; all that can contribute to His glory becomes the object of its desires and the motive of its actions. It sacrifices all to God for this end, and immolates itself entirely by continual abnegation, in order to gain souls who may glorify Him in their turn by accomplishing His Will.

The reunions of Chapter, by facilitating the acquisition of the spirit of zeal, give us also an occasion of exercising this zeal by the exhortation and the corrections.

THIRD POINT.

Examples.

Let us first consider our Lord, conducted to and accused at tribunals where He hears the most calumnious accusations and where the sentence of death is pronounced against Him. His hands are tied by the murderers; His tongue is free, but love enchains it. He teaches us what our conduct ought to be when we are accused and penances are inflicted upon us, whatever may be our innocence. He is silent; His silence causes his enemies to judge Him guilty; they treat Him as such, but always the same silence! . . . If they question Him, He replies very briefly, and then only to the president of the tribunal when he interrogates Him in the Name of the Living God. Behold our Model when at Chapter, or elsewhere, we are the object of accusation.

If we are placed in a situation in which we ourselves are to exercise zeal by making the corrections at Chapter, let us model our acts upon what Jesus did when they led to Him that poor sinner surprised in a crime: let us judge, let us correct, let us instruct with that wisdom, that charity, that compassion, which appeared in Jesus on that occasion. "Let him who is without sin," said He to the accusers, "cast the first stone". He condemns not, He takes measures that no person may condemn her; but He recommends the accused to sin no more, and He sends her away after having pardoned her.

Do not the instructions of Jesus to His disciples, the

reprimands which He addresses to them and the warnings which He gives them, teach us that it is the spirit of Jesus which directs Superiors who are charged to fulfill this charitable office in our regard? Peter is presumptuous—he receives a warning proper to make him enter into himself. Some of the Apostles entertain themselves about pre-eminence and hold vain discourses—Jesus instructs them, teaching them that he who wishes to be the greatest shall be the least and that he who wishes to be above others should make himself the servant of all. Are they preoccupied with terrestrial things and about corporal nourishment? He teaches them to seek first the Kingdom of Heaven, and tells them that His nourishment is to do the Will of His Father. Peter doubts while walking upon the water—He reproves him: “thou man of little faith”; but at the same time He extends to him His hand. This is what we see daily renewed in Religion. How many Peters, Jameses, Johns and Thomases there are who commit these same faults, who presume upon themselves, who wish for distinctions, who are preoccupied with the things of earth, and whom Religion warns, instructs and corrects with love!

Our Holy Mother may well find a place here, she who received with such admirable humility reproaches, corrections and penances. When they accused her of vain glory, of the desire of making herself noticed, she kept silence, but she spoke with all simplicity when she was questioned, and when she judged that the glory of God was concerned she then gave her reasons. At the time of the Reform, when people of the world, her own Religious, her Confessor, the Superiors, all turned against her, she was never wanting in humility for a moment; she examined herself, humbled herself, obeyed, and then put her confidence in God.

Let us listen now to the lessons she teaches up in Chapter XVI of the Way of Perfection upon the great good there is in not excusing ourselves: “It causes me great confusion to speak on such a subject; I ought at least to have practised some little of what I am going to say on the subject of this virtue, and I acknowledge that I have made very little progress in it. Never have I wanted reasons to persuade me that it was better to excuse myself. Sometimes, I know, this is permitted, and it would be

wrong not to do it; but I have not the discretion, or, to speak more correctly, the humility which is necessary to discern this. Yes, one must be truly humble to see herself condemned without being guilty and to remain silent: we then imitate very closely the Divine Lamb Who has effaced all our faults. I conjure you, my daughters, to give yourself up with all your heart to the exercise of this virtue; you will draw the most precious advantage from it. Make every effort not to render yourself guilty of any fault; after that, believe me, and take the resolution of never excusing yourself. I see absolutely no advantage in doing so, unless it is, as I have said, when we might cause some pain or scandal by not declaring the truth. She who has more discretion than I will easily see when it is proper to speak.

"In my opinion it is very important to exercise ourselves in this virtue; in other words, to try to obtain of our Lord true humility, of which He is the source. In effect, she who is truly humble ought to desire sincerely to be despised, persecuted and condemned without a cause, even in grave matters. If we wish to imitate our Lord, in what can we better do it? For this we have no need of corporal strength, nor of the aid of anyone whomsoever, save God alone. I should wish, my Sisters, that these great virtues might be the subject of our study and of our penance. I keep you, as you know, from excessive penances, because they injure the health when we give ourselves up to them without discretion. Here, there is nothing to fear; however great the interior virtues may be, they do not take away the strength of the body which is necessary for serving the Community, and they communicate to the soul an admirable energy. As I have told you before, acquire the habit of overcoming yourself first in very little things, and thus you will render yourself capable of gaining the victory in those that are greater. As to myself, I have never had the occasion to make trial of this in things of any consequence; never did I hear evil spoken of me that I did not see clearly that they had reason to condemn me for much more; and if I was innocent of what they accused me, I was guilty of so many other faults against God that it seemed to me He did me a great favor not to make them known. I will add that I have always preferred to be blamed for supposed faults than for real ones.

"It is of great importance for the acquisition of this virtue, to meditate profoundly upon the precious advantages of which it is the source, and how, all things considered, never do they condemn us without our having faults with which to reproach ourselves. Alas! we are always full of them: the just fall seven times a day, and it would be a lie to say that we are without sin. Thus, even when we are unjustly accused upon one point, never are we in reality entirely exempt from fault, as was our good Jesus. . . . O my Sisters! it is because we do not understand this truth that we are not perfect!"

If it is true that we do not understand this truth, what a practical knowledge this great Saint had of it! This is why she esteems herself happy to be condemned to prison and thought it strange when she was advised to take means to avoid it, saying that never would she do anything to dispense herself from obedience, especially in a matter of this kind.

Our Holy Father St. John of the Cross rivalled our Holy Mother St. Teresa in this respect. To what humiliations, to what accusations, to what penances did he not submit! And when God asked Him what recompense he desired for so many tribulations supported with so much generosity and love, he replied unhesitatingly that he asked for nothing else but new humiliations and new sufferings.

In Spain, in the Convent of the Carmelite Fathers called Calvaria, a Religious knowing that a Novice was tempted to take off the holy Habit, thought that he could transgress the law of silence to speak to him some words of encouragement, retiring for this purpose with the Novice into a very secret place in order neither to be seen nor heard. It happened however, that notwithstanding these precautions for the carrying out of this so-called good work done in secret, they were overheard; the Superior did not fail to give a public reprimand to the two who were guilty of a fault which, until then, had been unknown in the Monastery. The Prior regarding himself as the one responsible for so great an irregularity, immediately placed himself in position to receive the discipline and ordered all the Religious to give it to him, thus to chastise him in reparation for this fault.

The Chronicles of the Order furnish us with a number of examples of this kind; and we doubt not that it was this vigilance and zeal in correcting the least disorders which has maintained fervor and the spirit of Elias and Teresa among the children of Carmel.

We may here recall for our edification the example of that young novice who, being accused publicly of having hidden some berries in his cell in order to eat them, did not say a word to excuse himself, although he was entirely innocent. And another who was deprived of his Habit, clothed in a ridiculous manner, and condemned to pass nine weeks out of the enclosure, occupied in keeping the flock, for having laughed with one of his fellow Novices during the ringing of the Angelus; he prostrated without excusing himself and submitted humbly to the penance imposed upon him, believing that he deserved it.

FOURTH POINT

Examen

Have we understood well the necessity and the advantages of Chapter? Have we gone there with a spirit of faith, seeing God alone in the person of her who presides, and the Will of God in all that we are there taught, as also in the corrections and penances? Have we not reasoned interiorly upon the exhortations, either because they were not according to our taste or because we found our defects censured therein? Have we not been more prompt to apply to others rather than to ourselves what we have heard? Have we always listened with respect to the word of God, without considering the personal qualities of the instrument through which it was transmitted to us, either in Chapter or at the grate?

Have we received corrections in Chapter with humility, gratitude, and a desire to amend? Have we not suspected some one of our Sisters of having made known to the Prioress the fault for which she reproved us? Have we not supposed that caprice, ill-humor, envy, aversion, or some other evil motive was the cause of the admonitions which were given to us, and have we not preserved some secret resentment

or bad impression against those who have admonished us in charity? Yielding to this feeling, have we not desired to find them in fault, and have we not taken pleasure in seeing them fall into the faults which they had pointed out to us? Have we been faithful to pray for our Sisters who fulfill the office of Monitress?

Have we accused ourselves with simplicity, contrition and a desire of doing better, listening afterwards with docility to the advice or reproofs addressed to us, and receiving the penance with humility? Have we not believed that we were treated with more severity than our companions? Have we not excused or justified ourselves either interiorly or exteriorly, throwing the fault upon such, or such a Sister whose character and manner of acting, in our opinion, have been the cause of this breaking of silence, this impatience, or this little murmuring for which we have been reproved? While appearing to humble ourselves, have we not been glad to make known the disorders or the weakness of our neighbor? Oh! how skilful is self-love in disguising itself in order to surprise us! How many times have we not shown, under appearance of humility, that which, in truth, was only a refinement of self-seeking? How many times, under appearance of simplicity, have we not made use of round-about ways, and employed a certain manner of expressing ourselves in order that our own accusations might make us esteemed and unveil in an artful manner the faults of another? If we wish to be sheltered from these deceptions, let us put self aside when we are accused, when we are humbled, when we are corrected, although we be innocent; let us then recall the conduct and the teaching of our Holy Mother St. Teresa, let us receive sincerely and with our whole heart all that others believe it a duty to say or to do to us.

Are we well convinced of the interest that is shown in us when we are not spared, and the good that we do ourselves in treating ourselves without consideration? Have we not reason to fear that the manner in which we received observations and corrections

has obliged our Superiors to treat us with consideration and to take all sorts of precautions to avoid causing us offense, by telling us the truth, and to pass over in silence certain faults for fear of exposing us to commit greater ones by telling us of them? And their conscience is perhaps tortured by the embarrassment into which our want of the religious spirit casts them. Have we acknowledged our faults simply, without giving ourselves any trouble about the impression which this accusation might produce and without preoccupying ourselves as to whether it is of a nature to cause us to lose the esteem of our Sisters, and other windings of this kind?

With what dispositions have we listened to the accusations of which others have been the object, the corrections which they have received, and the penances which have been imposed upon them? Has it been with a feeling of compassion for their weakness, and of edification at their humility, sincerity and simplicity? Are the avowals of others a light for us, showing us the faults that we have neither acknowledged nor even recognized? Are the reprimands addressed to others a spur which excite us to the practice of more perfect regularity? Do we know how to take all things in good part, to interpret all things well?

When Monitress, have we kept to the words of the Rule and the Constitutions, limiting ourselves to observe the faults which we have seen, in order to give an account of them to the Prioress in simple, clear, charitable and humble terms? Have we not been too eager to accuse, to judge, and perhaps condemn others? Have we not been suspicious, considering as a fault what was not so? Have we not shown partiality in judging faults, exaggerating the faults of such and such a Sister rather than those of another? Has the love of God and of regularity alone caused us to observe and to denounce faults? Have we preserved our hearts in peace and in a charitable disposition in order not to allow ourselves to be blinded by some movement of nature, and to judge calmly according to the spirit of the Rule, the failings which

have come under our observation? Have we not allowed ourselves to be influenced by some natural feelings of discontent, of vexation or aversion? Have we not permitted ourselves to make reproaches and to give reprimands without having received directions to do so. Has it not happened that not being Monitress, or without any motive of charity, we remarked and reported the faults of others?

Have we exercised zeal towards ourselves by closing our eyes to the faults of others, to open them only to our own conduct, as our Lord has prescribed when He tells us that we should first remove the beam from our own eye before seeking out the mote which is in that of our brother? Have we proved by our exactitude to regular observance and the customs of the house, the importance which we attach to the discipline of the Order, by taking care to repair our least failings, accusing ourselves of them at Chapter and performing the penance which they deserve? Have we understood well that each one of our infractions of regular observance is a wound which we give to the Order, to our Sisters and to ourselves; and that the remedy for this wound is the public reparation which we make for the fault, if it is manifest? How ingenious we are in covering our own failings in order to excuse them in our own eyes and in those of others! And, on the contrary, with what facility do we not blame and judge the actions of others!

Have we loved, respected, and observed our Rules and all the customs of the Order, not considering these things in themselves but in relation to the Order to which they belong? Has our nourishment been to do the Will of God, manifested by our regular observances, either in studying them or in meditating upon them, or in exercising ourselves in their perfect practice, bearing them in our mind, in our heart, and in our hands, and showing ourselves, by our conduct, living Rules?

Have our conversations upon regular observance been vivified and supported by our example and by a practice more eloquent than our discourses? Alas! how many times have we not contradicted in our con-

duct what we preached by our words! Has not our irregularity opened the door to relaxation, or to habits contrary to the religious spirit? Has not our little respect for the customs of the Order led others to make little account of them? Have not the superfluous dispensations which we have accepted or sought after, authorized others to procure like dispensations for themselves? And thus, that which, if wisely regulated, should be done in extraordinary cases, has perhaps become ordinary and even habitual! . . . Have not those infractions of silence which have become so frequent and are degenerating into a habit, had their origin in our own infractions?

How many times have we not been heard speaking without necessity out of the hours of recreation, and perhaps during the hours of strict silence? Henceforward, when faults are committed which we might attribute to our Sisters, why not take the blame on ourselves and ask for the penance instead of being so eager to denounce them? Let us take care not to watch the conduct of our neighbor, and always to interpret with a charitable mind all that is not formally and evidently reprehensible. Let us go to Chapter with a true zeal for our own advancement in *the observance of the Order* and the perfection of our holy vocation. Let us accuse ourselves with sincerity, humility, contrition and simplicity. Let us listen to the exhortations with submission of mind, and a heart well disposed to practise generously all that we are taught. Let us never permit ourselves to make the least complaint, the slightest murmur, were it only interiorly, upon anything that is said or done at Chapter; let us think only of profiting by this religious exercise according to the spirit of the Rule.

Let us henceforth console the Order, our good Mother, by a practical love for regular observance, by our sincere respect for all that appertains to its spirit, and by our docility and submission to our Superiors.

CHAPTER TENTH.

Of the Fast.

Text: You shall fast every day, except Sunday, from the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross until Easter Sunday, unless infirmity, weakness of body, or some other just cause should prevent you, because necessity hath no law.

FIRST POINT.

It is obligatory upon a child of Carmel to fast eight months in the year; and as under this word *fast* we may comprehend all the privations which we should impose upon ourselves in order to establish the reign of God within us, we may say that the whole life of a soul called to Carmel is a perpetual fast. The mouth should fast from the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross until Easter; but the senses, the mind, the heart, and our whole being should fast throughout the entire year and during our whole life. Corporal fasting alone is insufficient; our Holy Mother the Church, in prescribing the fast of Lent, teaches us that it is necessary to accompany it with another kind of penance which consists in depriving ourselves of many things permitted; so that we should not content ourselves with retrenching from our nourishment but should retrench also from our sleep and from our conversations. And if the Church, addressing herself to all Christians in general, gives them this salutary instruction, what should she not expect from Religious souls who by their profession should tend to the perfection of Christianity? We have on this subject an exhortation from St. Bernard to his Religious which may well find a place here. This holy Father, considering the fast as a penance, says: "If the mouth alone had sinned, it alone should fast; but if all the other parts of our body have also sinned, it is necessary to oblige them to fast. Let then our eyes fast, our ears, our tongue, our hands fast, yes, even our soul. Let our eyes fast by abstaining from curious, unguarded and indiscreet looks, in order that they may be so humbled and abashed by penance that they will not think of giving themselves false liberties; let the ears fast by renouncing the hearing of tales, of news, and discourses which are not of God and which advance in no way the work of our salvation; let the tongue fast from slanders,

from murmurs, from vain and useless words, and even, out of veneration for holy silence, from those which might appear necessary; let the hands fast by not applying themselves to any vain occupation, by doing nothing that is not ordained by obedience; but principally, let the soul fast by overcoming all its vices and by renouncing its own will in all things." Have we not here the true spirit of the Church and of our holy Rule?

We can now see the necessity there is for us to fast and to do penance, for in Adam we have all sinned, and so should submit to the punishment inflicted upon the fault of our first parent. Adam committed a sin of gluttony and intemperance: fasting expiates it, for contraries are cured by contraries. All our sins have their source in that intemperance to which we are naturally inclined since the original fall; it is necessary then to expiate them by the fast which we impose upon our faculties and senses, in a word, upon our whole being.

Three principal motives make fasting an obligation for us: 1st. Because we have sins to expiate; 2nd. Because we have enemies to overcome. 3rd. Because the flesh revolts against the spirit.

1st.—Yes, privation or fasting expiates the sins which our intemperance have made us commit; the passage from St. Bernard, cited above, proves this clearly. Excesses of the taste require some retrenchment of food; excesses of the tongue, retrenchment of words; excesses of all the senses which lead us into disorders and to seek after what flatters them, require the curtailing and privation of these natural enjoyments.

2nd.—We have numberless enemies to combat; the world, the flesh, the devil, and our disorderly inclinations attack us on every side with dreadful constancy. They have recourse to a thousand snares in order to seduce us, offering to our appetites enticing meats in which the venom of sin is hidden. The world seeks to tempt us by the deceptive brilliancy of honor and glory; the flesh presents its enjoyments to us, and tries to make us sin by sensuality; the demon disguises himself under a thousand forms to make us fall into faults of pride and avarice—he represents to us objects capable of exciting our senses and passions. Our passions themselves make war against us and seek to draw our hearts after them into pastures for-

bidden to the sheep of the Divine Shepherd. In order to overcome these enemies, fasting is necessary, according to the opinion of a holy Doctor who has said that "fasting is the death of all the passions and the life of all the virtues". Fasting, by retrenching food from the body, from the senses and all that belongs to the "old man", surprises our vices by famine and destroys them; fasting disconcerts all our enemies whose enticements and snares no longer have any hold upon a well-ordered and mortified soul, one continually occupied in withholding from its senses all that may be capable of preserving in them the life of nature at the expense of virtue; and thus their malice cannot injure us.

In order the better to explain my meaning, I shall make use of a comparison. A person has determined upon my death, she knows that to attain her end violent means will not succeed. What does she do? she has recourse to an artifice. She presents to me, let us suppose, some fine fruit pleasing to my taste and into which a subtle poison has been injected. I do not fast, but allow myself to be tempted by this splendid fruit; I eat it, and all is over for me. If, on the contrary, I had subjected myself to the law of fasting, I would have mortified myself, I would not have eaten that fruit. Then, should not my enemy have been confounded?

Our spiritual enemies act in exactly the same manner. They take care not to present sin to us such as it is; but they conceal it under a thousand attractive aspects by which we allow ourselves to be surprised when we do not observe fasting in the full extent of the word. They present to our eyes a new and surious object which awakens in us no suspicion; if we have not already imposed the law of fasting upon our eyes, we will look at it and the poison will enter into our mind; the passions will very soon become agitated, and if our soul does not receive the death-blow, it at least becomes languid in consequence of this intemperance. If, on the contrary, I keep my senses under the yoke of mortification, I will deprive myself of this poisoned food; my soul will be sheltered and my enemies counfounded. It is the same with all the other senses.

The enemy presents to my ears discourses which excite my curiosity, and in which the venom of sin is hidden; if

I am mortified I close my ears to these vain and perfidious discourses, and again the enemy is confounded. In certain occurrences, the evil spirit suggests to me words which are spiritual, but sharp and cutting, and which would fall just to the point upon a person who has wounded my self-love; my tongue will remain mute if I have accustomed it to the law of fasting. He will present me with a thousand reasons, excellent in appearance, to excite my tongue to utter words of complaint and murmuring which trouble exterior order and soil my own soul; I fast, I keep silence, there is no disorder, no scandal, no sin, either for myself or for others. Let us search deeply into these important truths in our meditations; let us make practical applications of them, analagous to our position and employment, and we shall be more and more convinced that the salutary law of fasting assures our triumph over all our enemies.

3rd.—Fasting is imposed upon us in order to repress the revolts of the flesh against the spirit. Man, in coming forth from the hands of his Maker, was created in a state of perfection, all in him was well ordered: the flesh was perfectly submissive to the spirit and the spirit to God; but after his fall, by a just punishment the flesh revolted against him, and then commenced that continual war to which he has been condemned with his descendants, and which will endure until the end of the world. And from this first disorder—the revolt of man against God—arises a second, the flesh rises against the spirit, seeking to domineer over it and to become its queen and mistress, instead of remaining its humble and docile servant. If we do not reduce this domestic enemy by fasting we shall become its slave; for the more we give it the more it demands; the more we flatter it the more exacting it becomes; the more we give way to it the more imperious it shows itself to be. We say, without fear of being mistaken, that the intemperance of our first parents has overthrown the order of God, for it is in his reason that man is made according to the image of his Creator; so that according to the Divine plan, he can be truly a man only by the dominion of the spirit over the flesh. Fasting ought to re-establish this order, and, so to speak, re-create man. *wf*

How may this result be obtained? Nothing is more easy to understand. Two men live together: one has au-

thority over the other and rules him by force. Nevertheless, the weaker, through the imprudence of the stronger, finds means of fortifying and nourishing himself at the expense of the other; he carries off his goods and employs them for his own profit. Soon becoming the stronger, he puts under his feet the one who was formerly his master, and, depriving him of all nourishment, reduces him almost to a dying condition. What must be done to bring things back to their first state? One must be on the watch, stop the supply of provisions, prevent this usurper from exhausting the treasures of his master, and enfeeble him in every way; and, little by little, all will be restored to order. The flesh fattens itself at our expense; it ruins all our spiritual goods by its intemperance; let us retrench its supplies—retrench its nourishment, its sleep, its repose, its enjoyments and satisfactions; let us give it only what is strictly necessary, let us even be glad when something is wanting to it; and thus at one blow we shall overcome this rebellious flesh, we shall see it enfeebled and entirely submissive to its rightful master. The soul will regain its rights, and from being a slave it will become master; it will use its faculties freely and become so much the more powerful as its rival becomes more enfeebled.

As soon as we feel the revolts of the flesh, let us have recourse to fasting as to a sovereign remedy, depriving it of all that is most capable of encouraging the cause of its rebellion; at one time this will be the privation of nourishment or of sleep, at another time that of heat, again, of fresh air. Let us always deprive it of what it requires without necessity; otherwise we shall be vanquished anew.

Let us on the contrary nourish our spirit with God, with His word and with His Will. Our Divine Master has said: "Not by bread alone doth man live, but by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God"; and He declared also that His nourishment was to do the Will of His Father. Let us remark that He gave us these lessons on two occasions when He was practising corporal fasting.

Let us conclude then that fasting is necessary to man in order to re-establish him in his primitive state, because if he does not expiate his sins, if he does not combat his enemies, if he does not submit the flesh to the spirit, his

understanding will be incapable of knowing God, his heart of loving Him, his whole being incapable of serving Him and of attaining his end, which is life eternal.

Is not fasting then evidently most necessary for Religious, and particularly for a child of Carmel who by her vocation is called to the life more angelic than human, to a divine life, since she must tend to intimate union with God? St. Athanasius teaches us that fasting is the nourishment of Angels and that, when we fast, we enter by an admirable alliance into the state of these pure spirits. Since then our vocation calls us to this participation in the angelic life, let us fast in all the signification of the term, so that this life of the spirit becoming more and more developed in us, we may approach nearer to the purity of these celestial spirits.

And, in reality, we may say that the degree of elevation of mind to which one is called is in direct correspondence with the fasting which one practises. In effect, let us impose but a light privation upon our inferior nature and at once we communicate a little more life to the spirit; this is why persons naturally wise are sober and temperate. If we wish to develop this life of the spirit and to have it in keeping with the spirit of Christianity, we must increase, in the same proportion, the spirit of penance; this is why the Church prescribes fasting at certain times of the year, and particularly during that time when some great mystery is being celebrated. If one wishes to gain a new degree of supernatural life and approach nearer to the angelic state, again the practice of penance ought to accord with the degree of purity which such a one ambitions; this is why the Rule of Carmel obliges us to fast during the entire year and to mortify ourselves unceasingly. In fine, in order that the spirit alone may live, perpetual fasting is obligatory; this is the life of the Angels, it is that of the Blessed, and it will be ours if we are faithful to fast as God requires of us.

Let us then appreciate this law of fasting which is so necessary for repairing our unhappy past, as an aid for better employing the present time and to prepare us for a happy future. All the Masters of the spiritual life speak of its necessity and its excellence, and all the Saints have submitted to it with fervor and constancy; for fasting is the gate of Heaven. No Saint has been able to penetrate

into that abode of glory without passing through this gate, and not one of the elect shall enter there otherwise. If fasting is the death of vice and the life of virtue, whoever wishes to live virtuously should fast. If fasting is the wall which preserves chastity, and the fortress which defends purity, every soul who wishes to preserve herself chaste and pure should fast. In fine, if fasting is the castle where sanctity is kept in security, whoever wishes to be assured of his salvation should fast, and fast in the sense which we have explained above, according to the words of St. Bernard.

But since fasting is so necessary, so useful and so advantageous, why does our holy Rule introduce some exceptions, such as that time which elapses between Easter and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, Sunday, and during sickness? *Unless infirmity, weakness of body, or some other just cause should prevent you.* If, in order to conform to the spirit of the Church, which rejoices on Sundays and solemn feasts, we also relax somewhat on these days the austerity and rigor of the fast according to the letter, the spirit of penance and of mortification peculiar to the Rule always remains; for it is understood that we should always live according to the spirit even when the letter is less austere. The Church is a good Mother; she understands the weakness of her children; she knows a little repose is sometimes useful to renew their strength and to give them new fervor to run in the way of sanctity, (an arduous way indeed which bruises the flesh and the bones of him who pursues it) this is why the same spirit which animates the Church has inspired our holy Institutors, Legislators and Founders to prescribe times for the relaxation of austerities, in order that the bow not being always bent may regain its elasticity.

As the fasting of the body has some interruptions, so the fast of the spirit has also its moments of relaxation, such as the hours of recreation assigned by our holy Constitutions and the extraordinary recreation days customary in the Order; but while giving these reliefs to our weak nature, we are not dispensed from preserving that interior disposition by which we renounce all abuse of these reliefs, taking them in a spirit of humility as a remedy for our weakness, and seizing besides every occasion of making our senses fast, at one time our eyes, at another time

our tongue, and again our self-love. / And, by way of parenthesis, let us remark that it is always the time to mortify this miserable and inseparable companion of our pilgrimage who places in our path so many stones and so many obstacles to make us fall.

If we understand well our own interests, notwithstanding the dispensations and the concessions made to the weakness of our nature, we shall easily recognize that never being without sin to expiate, never without enemies to combat, never without our bodies, we must always be industrious, attentive and faithful to make some part of ourselves fast. We are as soldiers to whom some days of repose are given but who, knowing that the enemy is not far off, sharpen their weapons and keep themselves in readiness to repress an attack. They suspect the snares which might be laid to surprise them; and if during a feast they see themselves attacked, they leave the repast and fly to repulse the enemy. / So with us, this time of relaxation should not be exempt from exercise and labor; it should not be a time of repose, of security and of complete liberty. Our enemies sleep not, and they often seek to profit by this time of repose in order the better to surprise us. Let us then not sleep; let us watch always—this is the recommendation of our Divine Head; let us watch, that is to say, let us retrench from our senses all that might be to us an occasion of sin.

In time of sickness fasting, properly so called, is not of obligation for Christians; the Religious herself is also dispensed; but the obligation to fast from her will and from her senses always remains. Besides, is not sickness itself a fast in this respect, by the privations which it imposes and the mortifications which it occasions? For notwithstanding all the care with which Religion surrounds us, what occasions there are to suffer and to mortify our will! In the time of sickness, this is the fast that we must offer to God, this is the fast with which we must nourish our soul, by accepting in a virtuous manner the sickness, whatever it may be, the treatment of the malady, of whatever kind, and its consequences, of whatever nature. / We shall speak more at large upon this subject in the following Chapter.

Weakness of body, according to the words of our holy Rule, is another cause of dispensation from the law

of fasting. But in this state of bodily weakness what occasions we have for mortifying ourselves and for imposing a very rigorous fast upon our self-love! It is sometimes very painful to see ourselves incapable of following the exercises of the Community, incapable of rendering any service, and obliged to receive assistance from everybody! What a fast for the heart!

Or some other just cause; that is to say when Superiors judge that the work we have done becomes a just cause of not observing the fast, it being equivalent to sickness or weakness. It is left to those who have the authority and the grace to direct us to decide the just causes which may dispense us from fasting; our duty is to obey in all simplicity and to supply by the fast of the senses, of the mind and heart, for that from which we have been dispensed. If we believe it a duty to make some observations for refusing the relief which is ordered us, let it be with simplicity and submission, humbly making known our sentiments, but adhering in advance to the decision which will be given, without any inquietude about what is decided and what may happen.

Should we ask for dispensations? As no one is a judge in his own cause, and as we may easily incline the balance on our own side, either because self-love deceives us or that nature is too eager to procure itself some relief, we must refer the case to those whom God has charged with our direction. Let us expose to them simply our indisposition and sufferings, leaving entirely to their decision the choice of the reliefs to be taken. Let us also remember that our holy Constitutions recommend us to pray in order not to be deceived upon this point; for, as it says, "our nature often requires more than is necessary; and the devil on the other hand in order to withdraw us from fasting and penance, fills us with fears and apprehensions." / As to the rest, it seems to me that the words of the Rule are clear enough concerning this point upon which we are meditating, and lays down precisely what may be legitimate causes to dispense us from fasting; for after having mentioned sickness, weakness of body, or some other just cause, the Rule adds these words: *because necessity hath no law.*

If we weigh well the sense of these last words, we shall understand that we ought not to ask for dispensations

without evident necessity; we shall know how to discern a true need from one which is only imaginary, and we shall take care not to create one. Our Holy Mother St. Teresa tells us that we should not make much account of little ills, and that when the evil is great it will show itself. This great Saint remarks most judiciously that if we do not take care, nature will continually demand some dispensation: to-day it will be because we have a headache; to-morrow because we have had one; and the day after in order to prevent the return of the evil. Yes, it is thus that the demon, employing to his profit this tendency of our nature, wishes to make us take precautions against future ills or to prolong uselessly our care for those which are passed. Let us not allow ourselves to be deceived by this snare.

If we have maladies or infirmities which appear to us considerable, let us enter into the spirit of the Rule: let us make them known to our Superiors after having prayed to God, establishing ourselves in a state of complete indifference. If a dispensation is judged necessary, we are still within the spirit of the Rule, since obedience is the principal law for a Religious soul; if, on the contrary, God permits that our illness or our need be not understood, and that we are refused a dispensation, let us resign ourselves with a good heart and with love. One of two things will happen: either the evil will diminish and disappear without any relief, or it will augment in such a manner that the necessity will show of itself and we will be dispensed from the law without the intervention of any person. In both these cases I see only a benefit and an advantage for a truly Religious soul who abandons herself entirely to the guidance of God and of those who hold His place. In the first case, we ought to congratulate ourselves for not making any breach in our holy observances on account of an evil which disappeared of itself, and thank God for having inspired our Superiors so well; in the second case, we ought again to bless God who has permitted us to suffer something, and also because the necessity being evident leaves us without any inquietude on account of the dispensations which have been granted us, since it was physically impossible for us to accomplish the law; and thus we remain always within the spirit of the Rule.

SECOND POINT.

There is no doubt that the practice of this point of our holy Rule favors the acquisition of the spirit of penance and of mortification, since, as is well known, habit is acquired by the frequent repetition of the same acts.

A Rule which enjoins very frequent acts of penance ought to contribute greatly to the habit and the spirit of penance; because to have the spirit of anything is to have a knowledge of it, to comprehend it, to be thoroughly penetrated with it and to take it for our rule of conduct, even, so to speak, to identify ourselves with it, and this is acquired by habitual practice. We acquire the spirit of humility by studying the excellence and utility of this virtue, by inflaming ourselves with the desire of possessing it, and by exercising ourselves habitually in interior and exterior acts of this same virtue. We are so constituted that we acquire the spirit of whatever we practise habitually, particularly when we join to this a love and a profound study of the subject.

Our holy Rule by obliging us to fast every day during two thirds of the year, shows us that it has in view to aid us to acquire the spirit of penance and mortification. A first glance at this Rule excites in us a desire to consider it more attentively: we meditate upon, we study it deeply, and we become convinced of the necessity of fasting and consequently of penance; we recognize the advantages which our soul derives from the weakening of the flesh, the mortification of the senses and the subduing of the passions; we thoroughly examine the considerations made in the preceding point; and in proportion as we acquire a higher degree of knowledge, we acquire a degree more of esteem and love, and this aids us greatly to raise ourselves another degree in its perfect practice. Thus, by an admirable connection, the letter leads to the study; the study of the letter enables us to comprehend the spirit; the spirit penetrates and vivifies the practice; and the practice, in its turn, redoubles our zeal for study, perfects our knowledge and develops the spirit; and so it follows that we no longer live, so to speak, except by the spirit of penance.

In order to know if we have acquired the spirit of anything, we must examine if we practise it with facility, with pleasure and habitually. A person who has the spirit of the world gives herself up entirely to the practices

and customs of the world; she guides and directs herself according to its maxims, she concerns herself about its interests, its pleasures and its honors. She occupies her mind and fills her memory with it, and she makes it the ordinary subject of her conversation; all that surrounds her reminds one of the world, bears its seal: to express all in one word, it is her life. Let her be deprived of this aliment and behold! she becomes saddened, languishes and grows faint; on the contrary, let her be furnished with her accustomed nourishment, and immediately she brightens up, she expands and returns to life.

In the same way, a soul which has the spirit of penance and mortification, gives herself up to the practice of these virtues; this is the object of her thoughts, of her desires; her actions are inspired and vivified by this spirit; all that surrounds her, all that she makes use of, bears the mark of penance. Eager for all that can augment in her this life of the spirit, disengaged from material things and from the senses, she seeks continually for new occasions of mortifying herself, she is ingenious in finding daily new means of crucifying nature; to deprive her of this nourishment, for which she is insatiable, is to cause her to languish. From this it follows that a point of Rule which prescribes practices of penance and mortification necessarily feeds and augments that life and that spirit of penance which should be found in all the children of Carmel.

Let us bless our Lord for having called us to follow this path of continual penance which facilitates the practice of this spirit so necessary for detaching the soul from all creatures and from herself, and which conducts her into a most elevated region where she can unite herself to God by prayer and contemplation. In effect, we already have had occasion to remark that the spirit of penance opens the way to the spirit of prayer and union with God; and that the spirit of penance increases by the perfect practice of this point of the Rule, which is the same as to say that the spirit of prayer and of union equally augments.

Let us make a recapitulation of some of the preceding reflections by applying them to the subject which actually occupies us. Fasting is a reparation for sin, and the death of vice; it is the weapon by which we gain the victory over our enemies, it is the

bridle which checks the rebellion of the flesh and submits it to reason; all of these are so many obstacles opposed to the spirit of prayer, and they are destroyed by penance. Let a soul purify herself from her sins, let her conquer her enemies, let her master her flesh and restrain her passions, and behold, she is pure, peaceable and free; nothing more can oppose her communications with God and her union with Him.

✓ The spiritual life of man is increased and strengthened in proportion as his inferior nature is weakened. Is it not then true that food, even when taken with moderation, is an obstacle to the operations of the soul? This is so true, and has been so well proved by the learned and by the masters of the spiritual life, that the Institutors of Religious Orders in drawing up their Constitutions, are agreed in not fixing the hours for prayer immediately after meals; either because intense application of the mind at that time might prove injurious to the health, or because the labor of digestion impedes the operations of the soul by taking away its liberty of action. Our Holy Mother St. Teresa has fixed the hour of evening prayer before supper or collation, remarking that this hour is most convenient for that holy exercise; and she has made, not an hour of prayer, but an hour of recreation to follow meals, so as to profit by a time when we would be incapable of praying to give a little relaxation to the weakness of our poor nature. This evidently proves that fasting favors prayer, and aids us greatly to attain the end of our vocation, which is union with God.

But that fasting may produce this happy result, it must extend to all the inclinations of nature; for,—and we have sufficiently demonstrated this in the preceding point of this meditation—fasting ought to be the food of our soul, and it is only to the detriment of the life of the spirit that we keep up the life of the “old man.” Let us then retrench the food of this enemy of the spirit; let us be without pity for its demands, and rejoice at the facility which our holy Rule gives us of subjecting it to reason, and thus to leave our soul at liberty to act and operate in God.

It is then that zeal for the glory of the Divine Majesty and for the salvation of souls develops and gains rapid increase, in proportion as the spirit of penance and of prayer is established in our soul.

At the beginning of this meditation, could we have believed that such precious advantages result from the exact observance of fasting? Could we have thought that this point of the Rule was vivified by a spirit so capable of elevating us to such a high degree of perfection? Let us then conclude that it is very important to meditate upon our Rules, and that if our weak understanding there discovers so many marvels in a first consideration, what rich treasures shall we not find if we persevere in digging and searching in depths so fertile and so much the more productive as they are cultivated the more.

THIRD POINT

Examples

Our Lord Himself has practised the Rule upon which we meditate and He has given us the example of a fast much more rigorous and prolonged than ours. He fasted forty days in the desert before beginning His public life, in order to teach us that this exercise of penance is an excellent preparation for works of zeal, and that if we wish to labor with fruit for the good of souls, we must first disengage and elevate our soul above itself and all created things. But besides this fast for forty days, did not Divine Savior fast during His whole life by the practice of mortification and of renunciation; by the privations imposed upon Him by that state of poverty in which He willed to be born, to live and to die; by the obedience which He had vowed to His Father and which He practised until His death? What more accomplished model could we desire in order to learn when and how we should practise fasting in the full meaning of the term? Moreover, this good Master has taught us with what dispositions we should fast, that is to say, without ostentation, with humility and a holy joy.

Moses fasted forty days and afterwards God spoke to him and gave him His law. The holy Prophet

Elias likewise fasted forty days and he was honored with a vision of God; he ascended to Heaven by this mysterious ladder before being transported there in a chariot of fire.

Our Holy Mother St. Teresa so highly appreciated the advantages of fasting and the mortification of the body, the senses and the mind, that she established the Reform in order to be able to practise them with greater perfection. She knew by experience how profitable a mortified life is to a soul that she might glorify God and be useful to her neighbor. Should she have enjoyed communications with God, so frequent and so intimate, if she had not made her body and senses fast rigorously, so as to render her soul more capable of treating with Him? And it was by thus treating with God that she conceived those noble and generous sentiments of devotedness to God and to souls which sustained her in the midst of the many obstacles she found in the execution of her admirable plan of giving herself up to great austerities and of subjecting herself to a life of privation, so as to attract the mercy of God upon poor sinners. She was strongly encouraged and aided in this great work, which was to give so much glory to God, by St. Peter of Alcantara, of whom she has left us a beautiful eulogium, and who appearing to her after his death, revealed that his severe penances had procured for him great glory in Heaven.

This great Saint made his body and his senses fast in every way. The following is what our Holy Mother St. Teresa relates of him: "He told me that he had passed forty years without giving more than an hour and a half to sleep, and of all the austerities he had ever practised, that of overcoming sleep appeared to him, in the beginning, to be the greatest; that for this reason he always stood or knelt, and during the little time he sat down to sleep, he supported his head against a piece of wood attached to the wall; and even if he had wished to lie down he could not do so because his cell, as every one knows, was no more than four feet and a half in length. It often happened that he ate only every third day; seeing

that I was astonished at this, he told me that it was not impossible when one accustoms himself to it; and his companion assured me that sometimes he passed even eight days without taking any nourishment." Thus was our Holy Mother pleased to recount the penances of others, keeping ~~silent~~^{secret} about her own, which were, however, very great, notwithstanding the ruined state of her health. Her example had exercised so great an influence over her daughters of the Convent of Valladolid, that they gave themselves up to fasting and to extraordinary mortifications by which their souls became most intimately united to God. A Religious of this Convent, named Catherine of the Evangelist, worked day and night at the most fatiguing duties; nevertheless, she fasted every day on bread and water—this she continued during the space of forty years, and she would choose the stalest bread. Notwithstanding her great appetite, her sustenance for each day was reduced to half a pound of bread, which was as bitter as gall; for she had asked our Lord to give her this taste, and she esteemed herself happy thus to have something to suffer for the love of this Divine Master.

Another Religious of the same Convent lived for a long time on only ten or twelve mouthfuls of bread and a little water; she even passed several months without drinking. Many others practised fasts of the same kind, and all were very mortified, declaring an open war against nature, self-love and the senses.

The first Discalced Carmelite Fathers of Duruelo were also models of fervor in the practice of penance and fasting. Not content with the fast prescribed by the Rule, they introduced the custom, which has since become a law in the entire Order, of fasting every Friday from Easter until Exaltation of the Holy Cross, as also on the vigils of feasts on which the Church does not ordain fasting. Although they were very poor, they gave themselves no trouble to seek after anything but the Kingdom of Heaven, confiding in Providence for the corporal nourishment of which they were happy to deprive themselves for the love of God. Thus our Lord, Who takes care of the birds

of the air and the flowers of the field, did not abandon them, but providentially furnished them with what they needed; for it is not in vain that He has promised to give over and above what is necessary to those who seek first the Kingdom of God. But if they were eager to make nature fast, on the other hand, they hungered for prayer and for all that could nourish their soul. They were the first to establish the custom of spiritual conferences. They would propose as the subject of the conference the excellency of some virtue or the remedy for some vice; each one being interrogated by his Superior expressed his opinion upon the subject; and it is related that it was a remarkable thing to see the profit which they drew from this exercise, which was called a spiritual collation.

The Carmelite Fathers of the Convent of Pastana, founded during the life-time of our Holy Mother St. Teresa, observed extraordinary fasts. Besides those of the Community, which were very rigorous, each one would ask permission for those of supererogation: some would fast on bread and water during the whole of Lent, others took only a little nourishment in which they mingled ashes or wormwood. They refused to nature all enjoyments, even those permitted. We are told that the Superiors were obliged to moderate their fervor in this respect by not granting all the permissions that were asked; for fasting on bread and water would have become a daily occurrence, and would even have ended by passing into a custom. They were equally faithful in making their tongue, their eyes and their self-love fast. Silence was almost continuous among them, and spread throughout this Monastery a perfume of sanctity; their modesty was such that when eating or working in common not one would raise his eyes to look at the others: in a word, all in them submitted to the law of fasting. And therefore they were also souls of prayer who could raise themselves without difficulty above themselves and be occupied with God alone; and we may apply to them what St. Gregory Nazianzen says of the Religious of his time, whom

he calls, with St. Basil his friend, the disciples of the Prophet Elias. "I saw nothing," said he, "but fasting and watching; I noticed nothing but continual prayer, mental and vocal; nothing but hardened knees, from having them always bent in prayer; I heard nothing but striking of the breast, sighs and moans; I saw nothing but stations which lasted the entire night, nothing but the transports of souls abyssed in God; nothing but sweet tears in prayer and holy groanings which excited those who heard them to a like compunction. I saw nothing but celestial musicians, chanters of the glory of God, who intone His praises, meditate upon His law day and night, and taste here below the divine consolations of Paradise. They are heavenly men—and this was evident by their exterior—leading a secret and interior life which is very agreeable to God of whom they are the heralds and ambassadors upon earth. They neglect their hair; they endure bare feet; and, in imitation of the Apostles, they use nothing but objects which remind them of death. Their clothing is austere, their step is grave, their looks lowered, their countenance humble and gracious; their speech moderate and their silence rigorous. They find their riches in being poor, their possessions in being pilgrims and strangers in this world, their glory in contempt, their strength in infirmity and their abundance in want." Is not this a portrait of the children of Teresa? We must have remarked that it is by a life of penance and of fasting that both one and the other attained this degree of perfection, arrived at an intimate union with God, and at that life which is more celestial than human; hence we must conclude that the constant and perfect practice of our holy Rule will procure for us the same advantages.

FOURTH POINT.

Examen

How have we accomplished the law of fasting and in what dispositions? Was it with a conviction of the necessity there is to fast in order to expiate our sins? Was it with humility, recognizing ourselves as

guilty and truly incapable of repairing our sad past even by means of fasting, without the great mercy of God Who desires to aid us and to attach some value to our penances by uniting them to those of our Lord? Have we understood the necessity of fasting so as to overcome our enemies and particularly to repress the revolts of the flesh? Alas! how many times, on the contrary, have we not furnished our enemies with arms against ourselves, by giving every liberty to our senses to see, to hear, to touch, to feel, and to taste objects which our enemies make use of to war against us? How many times have we not authorized our flesh to revolt against us by granting it what it demanded, by conforming ourselves to its exactions, and by lavishing upon it cares and caresses which it has abused to our loss? With what eagerness, nay, with what inquietude, have we sought to procure for it the reliefs which it demanded as necessary, but of which it could well have dispensed without any serious injury. Our soul has been the victim of this weak condescension; it has become enfeebled in proportion as its enemy became stronger; the hour of combat sounded, and the weaker part has been overcome. To what purpose, after this defeat, are our complaints and our discouragement? If we have allowed ourselves to be overcome, to the point of becoming slaves of the one who ought to submit to us, are not we alone culpable for thus reversing right order?

How have we made our eyes fast? Can I say that mortification of the eyes is habitual, when I look at all that goes on in the different parts of the house, in the Choir, in the refectory; when I have my eyes open to all the actions of my neighbor? Perhaps, from time to time, I make some isolated acts of mortification of the eyes, which cost me so much the more as they are so rare; and this difficulty contributes to make them still more rare. Thus instead of acquiring that holy habit of mortification of the sight, my intemperance increases, my falls also multiply, and my soul is impoverished in proportion.

I may say the same of my ears which I do not

cause to fast; and of my other senses to which I know not how to refuse anything of what they demand, and from which I ward off all that displeases them; of my tongue especially, the intemperance of which can be so hurtful to Religion, to my neighbor and to myself; and it is however upon this very member that a continual fast should be imposed. Who can calculate the evil that it may do, the evil which it has done every time that it has not been faithful to the law of fasting? We may affirm, without fear of being mistaken, that the tongue of a Carmelite always does some harm each time that it speaks without necessity outside of the Rule and of obedience. An idle word is declared by Truth Itself to be a fault for every Christian; how much more is it so for all Religious, and still more for a child of Carmel, whose tongue ought in a particular manner to be condemned to continual silence. Who can count the faults of which my tongue has been the instrument, the wounds which it has inflicted upon my own soul, upon the souls of those who surround me, and upon the Community?

Has my will been faithful to the law of fasting? Is it submissive in all things to the Will of God, manifested to me by my Superiors, by the Rule, and by the events of life? Does it not rebel in the face of a contradiction, does it not make me lose the peace of my soul on account of some insignificant affair? No, I cannot say that my will is accustomed to fasting when the least mistake disconcerts me, when the least contradiction makes me murmur, when I do all that depends upon me to make everything turn out according to my liking, when my obedience is joyful only inasmuch as the acts prescribed are in harmony with my own will. It is then of great importance to accustom my will to perpetual mortification, for we do without trouble what we do habitually. Let us remark how hard fasting is for certain persons in the world who lavish the most delicate care upon their body; they are very much more disquieted about a single day of fasting than are those who, for some time, have accustomed themselves to this exercise of penance. Now, the will when accustomed to renun-

ciation, leaves us full liberty and every facility for accomplishing our duties faithfully, whatever may happen; contradictions do not affect us to the point of disturbing us, for we see in all things the Will of God. If, on the contrary, I nourish my own will, I experience all the agony experienced physically by those persons of the world cited above. The measure of peace and tranquillity which I experience on occasions of privation and renunciation will be in proportion to the mortification which I impose upon my will.

And does not self-love likewise merit to be subjected to a rigorous and austere fast? Should we be senseless enough to maintain this inseparable enemy of our soul who is so cunning in robbing it of its spiritual treasures? And yet, when I reject humiliations, when I seek to attract to myself the esteem and affection of creatures; when I take a secret complacency in my actions, in my natural qualities, and even in the graces God has granted me; when I am eager to justify myself interiorly and exteriorly, not being able to support the thought of passing for one guilty in the eyes of my neighbor or in my own eyes: do I not then serve to my self-love food which flatters it and which keeps up its vigor? Is not my soul troubled by humiliations and contempt, does it not lose its peace and allow itself to be carried away by ill-humor, murmuring, jealousy and other like acts: this is a proof that I feed my enemy instead of starving him; it is a proof that it is not accustomed to fasting, since it is so prompt to revolt at the least privation of food; it is a proof that it is very necessary to destroy its strength by a vigorous and continual fast. Until now I have given it too much liberty to live at my own expense; it is time that I arouse myself, that I make it fast until it no longer has strength to trouble my soul nor to disturb it, no matter what may happen to me that is humiliating and painful. Oh, how important then is fasting! Oh, how necessary it is for attaining the perfection of the sublime vocation of Carmel!

But it often happens that everything in us is al-

ready accustomed to fast except self-will and self-love, and these have scarcely made a step in this exercise of penance which ought to enfeeble and exhaust them, so that the soul may remain free to unite itself to God. Self-love is the last to allow itself to be reduced by famine: it continues for a long time to nourish itself with what we have retrenched from our other enemies.

Have I sought or desired dispensations from fasting without that *necessity* which *hath no law*? Or, falling into a contrary excess, have I not failed in submission when obedience dispensed me from fasting, holding to my own will and dreading the humiliation of being dispensed? When I have been dispensed from corporal fasting, have I persevered in that of the will and of self-love, making up for this privation of the fast by the mortification of my senses and passions? Have I not been scandalized at the dispensations given to my neighbor, forming on this subject rash judgments against her and my Superiors?

Have I understood well that a universal fast is absolutely necessary in order to disengage my soul from the world, from the flesh and from self, to render it capable of receiving the communications of God and of being united to Him? Am I at present very determined to retrench as much as I can, what feeds my body, my senses, my self-love and my passions, according to the light and inspirations of the Holy Spirit, conformably to the practice of the Order and of holy obedience? Am I resolved to beg of God the light necessary to recognize what I ought to retrench from my enemies, and the strength to resist them on occasions when they show themselves more exacting than usual?

Ah! Lord, enlighten me ever more and more; strengthen me also in proportion as Thou dost show me what I ought to do in order to enter into Thy views and Thy designs of mercy by accomplishing our holy Rule as perfectly as Thou dost require of me.

CHAPTER ELEVENTH.

Of Abstinence from Flesh Meat.

FIRST MEDITATION.

Text: *You are not to eat flesh meat except as a remedy in case of sickness or weakness.*

FIRST POINT.

We should not only fast and mortify ourselves as to the quantity of our nourishment, but we should also extend this mortification to the quality of our food. *You are not to eat flesh meat*; we must then join abstinence to fasting, even perpetual abstinence, in order that there may be no day of the year upon which our nature is not subjected to the law of mortification. Abstinence from meat during the entire year, even on the greatest solemnities of the Church: such is the Rule. The Constitutions, which are only a development of the Rule, also impose abstinence from eggs and milk food on all fast days of the Church, and every Friday of the year, except from Easter to Pentecost. Is not this a very pressing warning to excite us to conquer nature unceasingly, and an evident proof of the obligation we have contracted of living a life of continual mortification?

All that we have said in the preceding Chapter upon the necessity and advantages of fasting, may be applied to the practice of abstinence and of mortification, if we regard them as necessary means for expiating our sins, for overcoming our enemies, for mastering our flesh and, finally, for arriving at eternal life; because in this respect abstinence and mortification, considered as a privation are as necessary for our whole being as fasting; since the holy Fathers generally understand by the word *fast* all that relates to penance and mortification.

We shall not then repeat what we have previously said upon this subject; but as the matter is exceedingly comprehensive, and as further development by practical applications can be very profitable, we shall try to continue our reflections upon the practice of mortification which the Rule of abstinence renders obligatory for us. For, assuredly, we must not imagine that to abstain from flesh meat is to practise mortification to the full extent of the Rule, and that to enter into the spirit of the Rule it suffices to abstain from meat during the entire year.

The constant and universal practice of the whole Order is an evident proof that we should not limit ourselves to this privation which relates to food, and that by enjoining upon us abstinence from flesh meat the Rule also shows us the necessity there is of abstaining from all that could satisfy nature, the senses, and self-love.

We should realize in our life these words of our Divine Master: "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow Me." Would it be practising this self-denial to abstain from such or such a thing, and immediately afterwards to grant ourselves a number of other enjoyments? Should we be carrying the cross daily if we seek our own ease and satisfaction after some few acts of exterior penance? Can we follow our Lord by walking in another way than that in which He has walked? And we well know that the life of this good Master was one continuation of privations, of fasts, of abstinence, of mortification, of suffering, of humiliations, and of abnegation. The Rule implying but not expressing ~~these~~ conditions contained in the Holy Gospel, seems to say to us: We ordain the daily privation of flesh meat in order that this obligation may remind you each day that as the Religious State constitutes you disciples of our Lord, you should force yourself to follow Him in bearing your cross daily and in renouncing yourself by the practice of a constant and universal mortification; for the disciple is not greater than the Master, and if the Master was the first to do what He taught, the disciple should follow His example.

We do not then fear to say with the Masters of the spiritual life, that the duty of a Religious being to contradict his will continually, by this very fact his life becomes one of continual mortification for the body, the mind and the heart; and that the degree of spiritual advancement of a Religious soul corresponds directly to his spirit of mortification. Self-abnegation is necessary for all who wish to reach a high degree of the love of God, and the love of God calls equally for abnegation; these two virtues are linked together, they aid and strengthen each other. Let us then apply ourselves to increase our love by mortification and to perfect mortification and abnegation by love, since this is the means of attaining the perfection of our vocation.

We have said that mortification ought to be continual and universal; continual, because our enemies which it combats and weakens never sleep, and because we are overcome as soon as we cease to combat; because our disorderly inclinations, our bad propensities and our passions drag us into the abyss as soon as mortification ceases to oppose them; because grace is absolutely necessary that we may do good, and it is, so to speak, the price of our daily struggles. Mortification ought to be continual because it destroys the obstacles which oppose our union with God; lastly, because it increases our love which grows weak as soon as it is deprived of this nourishment. But of all the motives which lead us to embrace mortification, is not the example of our Lord the most powerful?

Again, it is necessary that our mortification should be universal, that it should extend to every portion of our being, as all in us is naturally inclined to evil. "I feel in my members," says St. Paul, "a law of sin which makes me do the evil that I would not and prevents me from doing the good that I would." Let us then do as did this holy Apostle, who again tells us: "I fight, but not as one beating the air: I chastise my body and bring it into subjection." And yet St. Paul was confirmed in grace; he had heard the Divine Savior assure him that His grace was sufficient for him. Notwithstanding this, he experienced the necessity of subduing the "old man" who will always be master if mortification, sustained by grace, does not reduce him to servitude.

To render mortification universal it must be exercised upon the flesh by fasting, of which we have already spoken, by abstinence, by painful penance and privations, and by the habitual retrenchment of our ease and convenience; in the second place, upon the senses, by repressing their activity and their eagerness in seeking after what flatters them; thirdly, upon the imagination, by arresting its wanderings and its fantastic operations, depriving it of objects capable of exciting its activity, or by occupying it usefully, when this is possible. At one time, the meeting with a person makes the imagination suspect a slight mark of indifference or of contempt, and puts it in motion; at another time, a word wrongly interpreted, a gesture misunderstood, will agitate it and cause it to make a thousand unjust comments capable of putting the soul in a state of

confusion. Again, there will be a desire or a fancy to satisfy which will precipitate it into a wandering state, in which it will try to foresee what will or will not happen, to compare events past or present with others which will never take place, and the perspective of which causes the soul to fluctuate between hope and fear, joy and sadness, hatred and love. Even in the affair of salvation, the imagination seeks to exercise its ravages by exaggerating obstacles, diminishing means at our disposal, making the conscience false, giving the soul a glimpse of a way which it represents as more direct for conducting it to perfection, but which by causing it to turn aside from the straight and simple way in which it ought to walk, casts it into trouble, inquietude, and sometimes even into despair. Again, it will be a plan of high perfection outside of the rule of obedience and of the common life, which the imagination will propose to us; or some imaginary view of the designs of God over the soul which will fill it with itself and with a false confidence, accompanied by an indiscreet joy. Again, it will be the representation of agreeable and flattering scenes or of sad events, which will make it lose time in vain joy or false apprehensions. Oh! how mortification well understood finds here wherein to exercise itself! It is this virtue which should cause the soul to become recollected within itself, in a spirit of truth and simplicity, and forbid entrance into this sanctuary to the "fool of the house," as our holy Mother calls the imagination.

Mortification ought to exercise itself upon the superior faculties of the soul, by not permitting the memory to recall things that are dangerous, hurtful, vain or useless, and by employing it only in what is of a nature to incline us to good; over the understanding, by refusing it all material with which to work at the expense of the glory of God and of our salvation, by obliging it to concentrate itself upon what is capable of inclining us to virtue and to the love of God, by forbidding it all those reflections too deep upon what concerns our personal interests, those thoughts which are developed to the profit of self-love, at the expense of charity, of the spirit of faith, or of some other virtue: these preoccupations having no other end than to find means of having its own will or of satisfying a desire or a passion. What false consequences are drawn from reasonings suggested by wounded self-love! What reso-

lutions made and executed as a consequence of ~~these~~ kind of reflections! No, no; the understanding, that noble faculty of the soul, has not been given to us to study falsehood and error, to penetrate into mysteries of iniquity; thus, mortification should be here also to lead it back to duty when it has gone astray, by presenting it with some useful, good or holy thought, which will occupy it; or with some mystery of our Lord, or some of His maxims, upon which to meditate.

Lastly, mortification ought to be exercised over the will and over all the affections of the heart, in order that all may be drawn towards the Sovereign Good. Ah! it is here that mortification can and should labor without relaxation to cut so many little and almost imperceptible cords which hold the soul captive; to root out the remains of self-love which prevent the soul from uniting itself to God; to uproot that great tree, the predominant fault, whose branches and root injure the virtues which ought to be cultivated in our soul, that it may become a place of delights for our Lord! What labor in order to unite our will in all things to that of God, so that there may be no longer anything in one that is repugnant to the other! What privations must be imposed upon this poor heart! Mortification having subdued all the rest without much trouble, finds in this field more labor than elsewhere. "After you will have left all," the author of the Imitation tells us, "leave yourself." This is the last place to be reduced because it is the last to surrender, and perhaps the last which we are willing earnestly to attack; to reduce the citadel of the heart, to snatch it from ourselves and give it to God, what a glorious victory! Cost what it may, we must with the aid of grace carry off this victory. Let us then go forth to the assault with great courage, with continual vigilance, with great confidence in God, and with much love.

First, let us examine our heart and its different movements by the light of truth, and let us see, without dissimulation, the cause and the object of the passions which agitate it. Here, we shall perceive a tendency to seek after our own satisfaction; there, a movement which draws us towards creatures, making us seek their approbation, their friendship and their esteem; an impulse which leads us to attach ourselves to some practice of de-

votion or of penance, to sensible consolations, to supernatural gifts; mortification will aid us to give to these different tendencies a supernatural direction by offering God to our will as the only object of its affections. Our heart is disturbed, it palpitates: let us examine the cause of this emotion; it is an eager desire to justify ourselves, too lively a fear of seeing our reputation somewhat compromised, or a movement of aversion; without delay let us call mortification to our aid in order to repress this natural movement and to excite ourselves on the contrary to the love of humiliation and of contempt, which will make us walk with constancy in the way of the cross. An emotion of joy or of sadness makes itself felt, let us examine its principle; if we discover that self-love excites it, we should again have recourse to mortification in order to supernaturalize its motive. We feel ourselves inclined to perform some action with eagerness, let us sound our heart; this examen will reveal to us a natural inclination, a little passion badly regulated—mortification should again be there to forbid this action; but if obedience requires it of us, mortification will cause us to accomplish it in a more perfect manner by imposing upon us the renunciation of the natural pleasure, and by having only God in view. Let us then in prayer meditate deeply upon a matter so fruitful, so practical, and of which we can here only give a few indications; let us try to understand well all that this rule of abstinence requires of us, and how in practice we should apply it to all that feeds our nature, our self-love and our own will.

After all we have seen concerning the sense of this Rule, it is evident that, since abstinence from meat reminds us of the life of continual mortification which should be ours, we are not authorized to make up, in some sort, for the privation of meat by lenten food dressed with care and delicacy. We have seen elsewhere that we shall eat what will have been given us in alms: now, the food which is given to the poor does not resemble that which is served to great lords. We must then take care to have no innovation in the manner of preparing our nourishment, in the quality of the food or in the seasoning of it, in order that our ordinary fare may always preserve that seal of poverty, of penance and of mortification which distin-

guishes it from that of worldings, and which makes us appreciate it as more conformable to our holy profession. It is true that the Constitutions direct that all the food should be well prepared; but this recommendation has always been interpreted in the sense of cleanliness and of the good quality of the food, and not in the sense of delicacy and of care which is greatly prejudicial to the spirit of poverty and of mortification. Let us then conclude that we must give ourselves up with a good heart to mortification, so that we may accomplish perfectly this point of our Rule.

SECOND POINT

If fasting favors the spirit of penance and of mortification, abstinence also singularly aids it; for all that habitually deprives nature, places it in dependence on the spirit and subjects it to the law of mortification, notwithstanding the little desire we may have of entering into the designs of God.

The child of Carmel, faithful observer of the law of abstinence, which forbids her all satisfaction, all seeking after her own taste, as we have just seen, finds in this a wonderful means of accustoming herself to mortification, of relishing its fruits and of strengthening herself in the spirit of her vocation. In effect, this habitual deprivation continually recalls to her mind that she has made profession of poverty in union with our Lord, that she is vowed to penance and to an austere life, for the expiation of her own sins, for drawing down the mercy of God on poor sinners, and His grace upon all souls; to imitate the Divine Master more perfectly and to unite herself more intimately to God: all these motives incline her to love this state of privation, and to esteem still more what the Rule ordains, by keeping herself in a state of continual mortification, and this through choice and through love for God, in order to glorify Him more.

Since prayer and mortification are two inseparable sisters, who work together and mutually aid each other to advance, it follows that, if the spirit of morti-

fication grows in practice as it is understood in this point of the Rule, the spirit of prayer will grow also, and acquire a higher degree of perfection.

The Religious who subdues her flesh by abstinence, approaches the angelic state and entertains herself more intimately with God; for God being a pure spirit, the more we weaken the flesh the more do we augment the life of the spirit, and the more also will our communications with God become easy and intimate. What a difference there is between the prayer of a soul which is mortified and disengaged from all that can satisfy the senses and please the flesh, and the prayer of her who still seeks her own satisfaction in anything whatsoever! The distance between these two souls is not less great than that which separates Heaven from earth.

When a Religious soul, by observing her Rule faithfully, despoils herself of herself by mortification, and raises herself to God by the prayer of the heart, by a practical prayer, that of the Garden of Olives, of Calvary and of the Cross, is not her heart filled with God alone and with zeal for His glory? The practice of mortification having destroyed the spirit of egotism, that great obstacle to the spirit of zeal, this virtue is enkindled in the soul, extends its influence and produces with the aid of grace wonderful effects. Such is the result of the practice of this point of the Rule: the renunciation of self in order to unite ourselves to God and to seek only His glory in all things, desiring to procure it either in our own person or by others, and immolating ourselves continually for this same end in union with our Lord. This zeal should be extended to the souls of others, making us desire their conversion or their advancement in perfection, and using every means in our power to work efficaciously for this object: prayer, penance, and good example are the special means at our disposal and within the reach of all; then by direction, exhortation and correction, if we have charge of others.

THIRD POINT.

Examples

The first model upon which we shall cast our eyes

is He Who has been the first of all to practise perfectly all Rules, and particularly that upon which we meditate at present.

What more perfect model of abstinence and continual mortification than our Lord? When did He ever make any account of good fare, and of what was pleasing to the taste? He ate with indifference what was offered to Him; and where was He served with fine and delicate meals? At Nazareth, the kitchen was certainly not that of a great lord. And with His Apostles? They were all poor men; fishing did not always furnish them the wherewith to nourish themselves. "We have labored all the night," said they one day, "and have taken nothing." This time a miracle is necessary in order to obtain for them an abundant supply of fish. When at the house of Lazarus, did not Martha perhaps dress Him some delicate meats? Even if this were the case, her eagerness upon this point was little appreciated by the Divine Master Who said to her one day: "Martha, Martha, thou art busy and troubled about many things: one thing only is necessary." At the wedding of Cana, it is to be presumed that they did not have a splendid feast, and that where they did not have enough wine to give to those who were invited, there could have been nothing fine or sumptuous in the service. In His evangelical journeys which were always among the common people and the poor, sometimes obliged Himself to provide by a miracle for the nourishment of His hearers, who then could have served Him a sumptuous repast? His poor Disciples procured in the towns and villages through which they passed, some little provisions in accordance with their poverty and shared them with Him. And in the desert? And on Calvary?

The Divine Mary gives us the same example, being herself a wonderful copy of the model we have just contemplated. It is true that at the wedding of Cana she solicited a miracle in order to supply the wine which was wanting; but it was through a motive of compassion for those who had invited them, and to spare them embarrassment and confusion. Oh! what

a life of mortification and renunciation was that of Mary! All the enjoyments that she could have had, all that could have been capable of procuring for her any pleasure, were seasoned with bitterness. The wonderful designs of God in her regard were accomplished only by forcing the sword of renunciation into her heart. If she sees herself raised to the incomparable dignity of the Divine Maternity, it is with a perspective of sorrow and of untold agony. Her Divine Son declares her the Mother of all mankind, she must receive as her children, and treat as such, those who crucified this well-beloved Son What renunciation!

Another model which we always delight to contemplate is our holy Mother St. Teresa. Notwithstanding her maladies and infirm state, her abstinence was admirable and continual, her mortification constant and universal; the signal favors which she received from God and the high degree of contemplation to which she was elevated, are an unquestionable proof of this. Mistress of renunciation in practice, she has also taught us this virtue in her writings, recommending that the first thing we ought to banish from our hearts is the love of our body. For, remarks our holy Mother, there are some persons so wedded to their own ease and their own conveniences that it requires not a little to lead them to embrace mortification; others seem to have come to Religion only not to die, so such care do they take to preserve their health. "And nevertheless, my daughters," adds this great Saint, "you have come to Religion to die for Jesus Christ and not to treat yourself well for Jesus Christ. With this love of our bodies, never can we succeed in obtaining liberty of spirit." Then, citing the example of Saints who were raised to perfection only by conquering their bodies and by practising renunciation, she confesses that she could do nothing until she had resolved no longer to make any account of her body and of her health: this proves to us that she spoke from experience.

Was not our holy Father St. John of the Cross also a perfect model of mortification? That man of entire

abnegation gave himself no relaxation, immolating to God without reserve all enjoyment, satisfaction and pleasure. He was not content with abstinence from flesh meat, but constantly abstained from all that could give life to the "old man," and it was thus that he became a true contemplative.

St. Bernard, whom we have already cited several times and of whom the remembrance always offers new subjects of edification, what admirable lessons of mortification does he not give to religious souls, and what has he not practised on this point before teaching it to others. We may recall here what we have had occasion to remark previously about the little account he made of the quality of his food to such a point that he no longer knew what he ate, having lost the sense of taste. He then had the right to speak with authority and energy upon this subject, and to leave to his Religious posterity lessons so strong and which he knew so well how to sustain by example. "What do you here," said he in one of his sermons, "you who take such care about the different quality of meats and who neglect your morals? Hypocrates and his followers taught how to preserve life in this world; Jesus Christ and His disciples, to lose it: which of the two do you wish to choose for your master? He declares plainly enough what master he follows, who reasons upon the properties of the food which he eats and who says: this injures the head, that the chest or the stomach . . . Have you ever read in the Gospel that these differences have at any time been remarked?"

A Religious of one of our Monasteries in Spain, believing that she had sufficient reason for being dispensed from fish, was taking her meal with meat in the Infirmary, when our holy Mother St. Teresa, who had been dead for some time, appeared to her. Regarding her with a severe air, she reproved her for this irregularity in energetic terms which penetrated the heart of this good Sister and touched her so sensibly that she threw upon the pavement the rest of her portion, and was ever afterwards a perfect model of mortification and regularity.

The ancient solitaries and anchorites, whom we call our Fathers, nourished themselves only with herbs and roots: what would St. Hilarion, St. Paul, St. Anthony, say if they could see the food which is now prepared in many religious houses! Our holy Father St. Elias ate bread which was brought to him by the poor widow of Sarepta.

What shall we say of that holy woman, Catherine of Cardona, whose penitential and mortified life makes nature shudder? She was so accustomed to eat green herbs that when she was obliged by obedience to take other food her stomach could not support it.

FOURTH POINT

Examen

How have we observed the law of abstinence? It seems at first sight that when we have always abstained from meat, we have nothing with which to reproach ourselves; but have we not failed in the spirit of this point of the Rule by seeking to gratify our taste in our food; listening to our repugnances which a little generosity would have made us surmount; satisfying our fancies; choosing this rather than that, without a real necessity, perhaps under the pretext that such food would injure us; seeking to satisfy our taste in the seasoning of the food, entertaining ourselves and others about it, making reflections and remarks; making known our tastes and repugnances, murmuring at the negligence of the cook; accepting with a bad grace the remains which have been served to us and perhaps preserving in our minds, on account of our mortifications in the refectory, impressions of sadness or of disgust. Ah, Lord, if we were dead to ourselves, what effect would things of this kind have upon us! Would they even be worth our attention?

But it is not enough to despise the body and that which nourishes it. Have we understood well that the spirit of the Rule goes much farther and requires that we abstain from all that can preserve the life of the "ego" within us? Have we abstained from look-

ing at, from touching, hearing, saying and doing what tended only to satisfy us? How many curious and indiscreet looks! How many words which are useless and spoken out of time! What little self-seekings in the touch! What liberties granted to our senses which have kept up the life of the "old man" within us by the satisfactions which we have procured for ourselves!

Have we had the temerity to complain of the wanderings of our imagination when we ourselves are so eager to furnish it with distractions and so negligent in withholding from it the objects upon which it can exercise itself and afterwards exercise our patience? Why do we regard the actions of such or such a person when we know that it furnishes the imagination with subjects for a thousand comments, a thousand false suppositions, which give us temptations and perhaps cause us to fall into some fault?

Was it mortifying our memory to recall things which we have had so much trouble to put out of our mind? Why recall so many remembrances of the past? Why go back in thought to a circumstance in which our self-love has been flattered by some word or proceeding which we have sensibly felt? How many notes have we not taken upon the proceedings of others in our regard instead of noting the examples of the Saints, the instructions of our Divine Master, the means of correcting our faults and of practising virtue?

Does mortification exercise its happy influence over our imagination? With what is it generally occupied? What are its most frequent subjects of consideration? Is it more skilful in developing a maxim of our Lord than a word which has been spoken to us in a moment of temptation? Do we not often represent to our understanding remarks contrary to the respect, the submission and the obedience due to those who have authority over us?

Have we subjected our heart to the law of abstinence? Do we stifle in their birth, by mortification, so many movements capable of turning us away from God, so many natural emotions, the principle of which

is bad and the results of which are always detrimental to the perfection which God asks of us? Have we repressed the many sentiments of affection or of aversion, the consequences of which could be very sad?

In fine, has our entire being been subjected to the law of mortification and of abnegation required of us by the spirit of our holy Rule? Ah! if we would give ourselves up to the practice of this virtue, we should understand that it is painful to those only who do not practise it, or who practise it imperfectly. Its name alone affrights us. It is true that nature shudders at its aspect, seeing itself menaced with being subjected to its empire; but when we practise it with love and generosity, oh! what blessings it procures for the soul! what peace! what light! what graces! Do we not wish that God alone should dwell in and govern our soul? Why then do we withdraw ourselves from what disposes us to receive this grace? It is this which purifies our soul from all that renders it unworthy of God, and shall we repulse it? . . . It is this which adorns our soul with the virtues that attract within us this God so good; and should we not be glad to have it for our companion and our friend? And if we fly from it, is it not true that we fly also from the Sovereign Good? It is then no longer God that we seek; it is ourselves, it is our own good, our repose in this life. And what then of Heaven? . . . Ah! we still desire it perhaps but upon conditions that it costs us nothing; now, the key which opens Heaven to us is renunciation, it is the cross, and our Lord has declared that to enter His Kingdom we must do violence to ourselves.

These are not words void of sense and of practice. Do we do violence to ourselves when we study the demands of nature to satisfy them at the expense of regularity, of charity, and of all the rules of religious mortification? Do we do violence to ourselves when we follow the first movement of natural instinct in contradictions and the little annoying events which happen to us? Do we do violence to ourselves when we know not how to endure a little suffering without

complaining, without asking for relief? Oh! how senseless we are, if we act in this manner!

If all the Holy Gospel had been written in Hebrew and had never been translated, we who have no knowledge of that language should certainly be excusable for not understanding the sense and the value of the words; but, thanks be to God, we know the language in which this Divine Law is presented to us; we know very well that the word *renunciation* does not signify *love of self* at the expense of the love of God, nor *seeking after our own ease and all that satisfies self-love*. We know very well that to do ourselves violence we must act with courage against natural inclination. We know very well that to carry the cross is to suffer with patience and resignation all the trials of life. We know very well that our Divine Master has told us to follow Him if we wish to be His disciples; and that to follow Him we must walk with Him along the way of the cross, of abnegation and of entire death to self, forcing ourselves to become, as He was, meek and humble of heart. Why then do we act as if we did not understand the Holy Gospel?

It is because we do not meditate upon the divine teachings which it contains in such a manner as to make the application of what our intellect is capable of understanding and our will of carrying out with the aid of grace. It is because we do not pray to obtain this grace; and we do not pray because we do not examine these matters thoroughly enough to feel the need that we have of aid from on high. Let us reanimate our faith, let us have recourse to God with confidence, and with a good will let us set to work to practise our holy Rule in all its perfection; and God aiding, our efforts shall be crowned with success.

CHAPTER ELEVENTH. (Continued.)

Of Abstinence from Flesh Meat.

SECOND MEDITATION.

Text: *You are not to eat flesh meat except as a remedy in case of sickness or weakness.*

FIRST POINT.

We have seen in the preceding meditation the meaning of the first words of this point of the Rule: *You are not to eat flesh meat.* . . . Let us now see, with the aid of God's grace, the sense of the words which follow and let us occupy ourselves especially with the subject of sickness, since these words: *except as a remedy for sickness or weakness*, lead us to this important subject which so well merits our particular attention.

Let us notice, in passing, the all-maternal charity of the Order in the care it takes of the souls and bodies of its children, according to the measure of their needs. For the good of the soul it prescribes abstinence, mortification, etc. As to the needs of the body it provides nourishment in health and procures reliefs in sickness. In making our vows we have given all to this good Mother, our body as well as our will and all our goods. We have not reserved any right over all these things: the Order has become the proprietor of them; and, on its side, in receiving our offering, it has pledged itself to furnish all that is necessary in the order of God and according to His designs, for the body as well as for the soul.

According to this contract we have the obligation of abandoning ourselves entirely to the Order and it has charged itself with the obligation of providing for us at all times and on all occasions as a mother does for her children.

We are under the obligation of accepting and of loving, as coming from the hand of God, all that happens to us in health and in sickness without troubling ourselves about anything, since the Order, being the depositary of the temporal goods and of the designs of God over us, is charged to provide for all that concerns us. Thus when we are in health we should receive in these dispositions nourishment, clothing and other necessary things such as it pleases God to provide them for us. In like manner, in time of sickness we should see His hand and His Will in the evil

that afflicts us, in the attentions of those who surround us, in the food which is given us, in the humiliations which accompany the sickness, etc. Let us take care not to judge of things in themselves and by the effects which they naturally produce. Let us take care to see in our maladies and in their consequences, nothing but the Will of God and the accomplishment of His designs, which are full of goodness and of mercy.

A false zeal very often deceives us in making us believe that it would be much more advantageous for us to be able to follow the Community life, to work much, to fast, etc., than to be sick or ailing. Then we wish such remedies, such treatment, such nourishment which, according to our idea, would cure us much sooner; thus we put ourselves into a state of temptation; we find fault with the manner in which we are treated; we examine with anxiety both the sickness and the effect produced by the food and the remedies given us; then come complaints, impatience and perhaps murmurs!

But, have we then given ourselves to the Order to do this or that!.... Was it not only to place ourselves at its disposal in all things? Is it not this which makes a Religious? Have we entered into the Cloister in order to preserve our health?... Was it not in order to live there in absolute dependence upon God, and to do His Will in sickness as well as in health? Do we cease to be Religious because we are sick? Should we take back our own will and our own judgment? No, certainly not, since there are rules to follow in case of infirmity.

Our Constitutions are so expressed as to make us understand that sickness ought to be for us an occasion of showing the virtue we have acquired in health, and a means of making still greater progress in it; and that it is also for those who surround us a means of advancing in virtue by furnishing them with occasions for practising charity, devotedness, etc. On the one hand, they must provide for the wants of the sick; on the other, the sick should not be exacting. The Constitutions wish that they should have consolations and be better treated than those in health, at the same time remaining within the limits prescribed by our poverty; but it also wishes that the sick should know how to content themselves with what is given them, and do without many things which the rich have

in sickness and which perhaps they could have had in the world. On the one hand, we see the vigilant tenderness of the Order which directs that Infirmarians be charitable and attentive in providing for the needs of the sick; and on the other hand, we see the solicitude of this good Mother for their souls, when she shows them the means they have of profiting by the exercise of patience, of obedience, and of mortification. Such is the spirit of the Rule.

We see by this rapid glance, that this point of the Rule which treats of sickness is one of great practical importance for the good of souls in particular, for the general good, and for the glory of God. We fear not then to enlarge a little on this subject, because great good or great evil may result from it, accordingly as it is well or badly understood, and well or badly practised. Sickness can be a source of great blessings, of graces, of prosperity, both spiritual and temporal, if we conduct ourselves during it in a virtuous manner, and conformably to the rules of charity, poverty, obedience, etc., as our Constitutions wish. And can we not say that it is for this reason that maladies are sent to us? But these same maladies can also occasion the ruin of the Order, spiritually as well as temporally, if they are not borne religiously and virtuously.

In order to develop this thought, let us lay down as a principle what each one of us knows, but of which the practical conviction is rare enough: nothing can happen except by the order or permission of God. All that God orders or permits is for His glory and for our greater good. To enter into His designs then, in all that happens to us, is to procure His glory and our own good; not to do so is to disturb this order, and, consequently, to cause great evil. Not to receive sickness as coming from God, not to accept the treatment, the consequences and humiliations of it as coming from Him, and not from creatures: this is a first disorder which draws after it a number of others, and which arrests the course of God's graces, and this cannot but contribute to the ruin of the Religious edifice; for the spirit of faith being the support, the soul and the life of the Order, to deprive it of this is to cause its death.

Let us see, in effect, how, without a spirit of faith, we

cease to be Religious; and we shall understand the evil which this disorder can occasion. Without the spirit of faith we see in sickness only suffering, weariness and difficulties; we are discontented, we complain, we disquiet ourselves, torment ourselves, and murmur.... Is there anything religious in this?.... Without the spirit of faith we see in the remedies, in the treatment, in the physician, in the persons who surround us and who take care of us, only what these persons or things are in themselves, their weakness, their defects, etc.; all cross us, all disturb us, all make us impatient. We look at ourselves from a human point of view, like we look at everyone else; we are touchy about ourselves, we are peevish with ourselves; we want this, and not that; we find fault with everyone because we suffer, because we are in a languishing state, because we relapse into faults... Is there anything religious in all this? Without the spirit of faith there is neither respect nor submission to Superiors, or to those charged with taking care of us; we hold to our own judgment, we do what we like; or, if we do not do it, we complain to ourselves, often aloud, perhaps even very loud. Is this religious?... By this the whole machine is put out of order, since the great wheel of the spirit of faith which governs all the others is no longer in its place.... How then can we count upon results advantageous to the soul and glorious to God? The divine plan is disturbed, and what but disorder is the consequence.

God sends illness to purify souls, to unite them to Himself by suffering, to take pleasure in their submission, their charity, their patience, their spirit of poverty, of penance, of obedience, of mortification, of confidence and of love, desiring to lavish His graces and blessings upon them if they would enter into His designs: is this realized when they do not receive sickness in a spirit of faith?... God wills according to the measure of the submission, abandonment and love of the Religious soul in sickness, to lavish upon her marks of affection altogether special, to take a particular care of her, to provide Himself, perhaps even by a miracle, for all her wants, and even for some little fancies; He wishes to indemnify the Community for the expenses occasioned by sickness; in a word, He wishes to show to all that He is faithful to His promises. But, for this, it is necessary that the soul which

is the object of these promises should also be faithful to hers; that she abandon herself into His hands with faith, confidence and love; that she forget herself to be mindful only of Him, of His Divine Will and His glory. She destroys the contract by her conduct, altogether natural and human; hence God is no longer bound to His part; He retires with His gifts and His promises, the soul remains alone with her miseries; with the diminution of grace nature grows stronger, its exactions augment; from poverty she falls into misery,—misery within, misery without—and what is the result of all this? Alas! God preserve us from all the disorders which follow this first disorder !....

Let us draw the curtain before so lamentable a picture in order to consider the advantages which sickness procures when received and borne according to the designs of God.

Our Fathers and Masters in the Religious life were so well convinced of the utility of sickness for truly religious souls and the great good which results from it for Communities, that they chose, so to speak, unhealthy places in which to fix their dwelling, in order that they might always have sickness among them; and as they were truly religious, they underwent with happiness what here we only know how to stammer about with admiration and desire. Let us then look at a truly religious soul attacked with an illness which we shall suppose to be most painful, most humiliating and of long duration... She knows the merciful designs of God in her regard; at least faith makes her understand that the sickness has been sent for her greater good and for the greater glory of God. If nature shudders, terrified at the sight of the cross and the bitterness of the chalice, faith, confidence and love very quickly gain the ascendancy; and the more the weight of nature seems to drag down this soul, the more she elevates herself towards God and abyssees herself in His holy Will, where she finds light, grace and strength.

This Will, through which she considers persons and things, makes her see all in the same light and find all the same to her taste: all things appear to her agreeable and pleasant, being colored and seasoned by the good pleasure of God. Thus the kind of sickness, the remedies, the cares, the room, the clothing, the physicians, the persons

who surround her, nothing of what they are in themselves attracts her attention, but only what they are according to the good pleasure of God. If cares and consolations are lavished upon her, she thanks Divine Providence for it; she humbles herself and is confounded... If, on the contrary, notwithstanding the good will of all those charged with taking care of her, the treatment and care appear to her short of her wants, real or imaginary, (for there is much of the latter kind, particularly among women,) she sees always in this only the good pleasure of God. The thought does not even occur to her of talking to the physician, to the Prioress, to the Infirmarians, or to the other officials, of the quality either of the remedies or of the food, as she sees in all things only the good pleasure of God. From this comes an evenness of temper, kind feelings towards everyone, reserve in words, and a constant and gentle submission. If she believes it her duty to make some observation, she first recommends the matter to God in order to see if she ought to speak of it, and when and how she ought to do so; after which she speaks only to the proper one, in simple, humble and submissive terms, keeping herself in a state of entire indifference as to the result of this manifestation, whence it follows that a granting of her petition or a refusal from the Prioress or the physician is for her the compliance or the refusal of God. An awkwardness or a forgetfulness on the part of the Infirmarian or any one else is not a crime in her eyes, but a divine permission sent to humble both one and the other, to make them practice fraternal charity, forbearance, patience, mortification and renunciation... Even her weaknesses or the faults into which she falls, (for even the just fall seven times a day) do not discourage her; she humbles herself for them and does not allow the sun to set before she has repaired them.

She is abandoned to the good pleasure of God, consequently, she is submissive and obedient at all times and in all circumstances; she conforms herself to the regulations prescribed, as far as her state permits, showing herself a Religious by her detachment from herself, she avoids all preoccupation and also the worrying of others with herself and her illness without necessity. When she must speak of it she makes use of simple expressions, without exaggeration, and without attachment to her own judgment.

She testifies sincere gratitude for all the care that is taken of her, she avoids giving pain and of showing discontent or repugnance for what is offered to her. If necessity constrains her to refuse anything, it is with confusion, without ill-humor, and never in a manner which is not edifying and religious. In fine, this soul who in health, retired within her cell, appeared very ordinary and, in effect, without this sickness would have been only a soul of very mediocre virtue, now sheds around her a perfume of sanctity which embalms the Community and rejoices the Heart of God; she attracts abundant graces upon herself and upon her Sisters who, on her account and through her example, also practice excellent virtues.

Whence it results that, each one of them trying to seek the Kingdom of God and His justice, God gives them, as it were, a foretaste of that heavenly Kingdom, and even distributes to them an abundance of all sorts of goods which they had neither desired nor asked for. He provides for all the expenses which the sickness had caused; and this often in a wonderful manner which we must consider as miraculous. If illnesses and the cares they necessitate hinder the work which serves to maintain the Community, the Providence of God supplies for it by means known to Himself. If the sick have some wants for which it is impossible to provide, God comes Himself to their aid; He is pleased daily to work miracles in favor of Communities where these trials are well received and religiously borne. We shall have no difficulty in believing the examples which we shall cite very soon, if we remember that many a time we have seen them renewed before our eyes.

Besides what we call sickness, properly speaking, which has its determined course, there is also a certain delicate state of health which prolongs itself and becomes a settled condition in some persons, in such a manner as to render them sickly all their lives. This state particularly requires and calls into exercise many virtues, without which, nature, gaining the ascendancy, makes us lose our by little the religious spirit at the same time as we lose our health. The Rule full of charity, grants reliefs not only in sickness, as we have just seen, but also in the state of weakness, which can be understood of a convalescence

from a spell of sickness as well as of a state of habitually weak health.

Let us carefully remark that our Lord, Who directs all things and Who wishes us to practice charity by giving remedies to the sick and reliefs to the infirm, permits sometimes, and even very often, that these remedies or dispensations do not produce the desired effect, in order to try the patience and charity of some, and the spirit of renunciation, of abnegation, and of regularity of others. It is in such circumstances, which are frequent enough with us, that the infirm should exercise themselves in the practice of those virtues which God asks of them, by accepting with resignation this state in which they seem to be of no use except to give trouble, to cause expense and to be an occasion of temptation to others; (because the imagination gives such pretexts to self-love and thus very often disturbs souls). They should then accept with humility and disengagement dispensations which are marked with the divine seal of obedience, and take good care not to complain if these reliefs are wanting to them from any cause whatever; for this would be to complain of God Who has willed or permitted things to happen thus, making use of His creatures and of events to prove the fidelity of souls whom He has chosen for Himself.

We should also remark that in time reliefs having become habitual, no longer produce any physical benefit and they injure the soul considerably. This is why we should try to return little by little to the common life, first in one thing then in another; we shall not become more infirm on this account, and we shall have the consolation of practicing regularity, of suffering for God, and of giving edification to our neighbor. But in order to act thus, there is need of courage, of generosity, and a great love of God; for our miserable nature is always demanding something, particularly when we consult it in such circumstances. Let us wean it, so to say, without anticipating its wants, and after having put our hand to the work let us turn a deaf ear to its demands. Let us observe, however, that in this as in everything else, we must act conformably to obedience; for we should not show more self-will in curtailing dispensations than in seeking them.

To resume all that we have said, the virtues to be practiced in sickness as well as in a state of infirmity and

of weakness, are : submission and abandonment to the good pleasure of God, union with His Divine Will ; gratitude for the cares which are bestowed upon us, whatever their result may be ; mortification, patience, simplicity, humility, love of regularity, obedience, renunciation, self-abnegation, and the spirit of faith which refers all things to God, and receives all things with love as coming from His hand. The fruits of these virtues are : joy of soul, peace of heart and of conscience, edification to our neighbor and the spiritual and temporal prosperity of the Community.

A few words now to the Religious who are charged with the care of the sick and the infirm, and to those who are in good health. There are here also great virtues to be practiced. Those who have care of the sick and the infirm should be ingenious in foreseeing their wants, in sparing them new sufferings and moments of sadness or of painful combat, and in guessing what could please them, but always within the bounds of regularity, of obedience and of poverty. They will then experience how rich God is in resources to supply for what they themselves cannot do ; and if their charity and good will are powerless, our Lord will bless their pious desires by making them very efficacious.

Patience here finds a vast field wherein to exercise itself by supporting human weaknesses and exactions ; and humility likewise, by accepting reproaches, whether merited or not. All the other virtues may be equally practised : gentleness, vigilance, obedience, submission to the designs of Providence, confidence, loving abandonment into the hands of God ; prudence and discretion, in order not to make known to others the miseries which we have witnessed ; entire self-abnegation, in order to give one's self to the exercise of charity, at the expense of her repose, of her tastes, of her health and even of her life, without any self-consideration.

Lastly, those Sisters who are neither sick nor Infirmarians, should close their eyes to the conduct of both one and the other ; they should aid them by their prayers, and in other ways also, if obedience enjoins this upon them. Let them avoid making any reflections upon themselves, glorying in the good health which facilitates for them the entire and constant accomplishment of the Rule ; let them rather humble themselves because God has not

found them worthy, on account of their little virtue, to be honored with His visit by sickness or infirmity. They should avoid judging those who are subjected to reliefs and to dispensations, and take care not to suppose that it is through immortification, or imagine that they are a burden to the Community, etc., etc. Let them on the contrary be edified at their virtues; let them soothe by their kind offices what is painful and humiliating in their state. Let them not envy them on account of their dispensations, and believe that they have a right to ask for them because others have them; let them not think of making comparisons between these and those Sisters, between others and themselves. Establishing themselves upon a solid basis of charity and humility, let them disengage themselves from their petty, personal interests; let them close their eyes to all that is going on around them, and open them only to see what the good God asks of them and the means of executing it; then all things will be in order. They will not murmur at what is done in favor of this one or that one, at the expenses which sickness occasions, at the work being suspended, nor at the privations which they must impose upon themselves, etc., etc. With the eyes of faith they will discover in all this the secret designs of the mercy of God; they will redouble the fervor of their prayer, their zeal for regularity, labor and economy, their good will to practise the virtues of charity, humility and obedience; and God will be glorified.

I dare assert that a Religious Community, however poor it may be, however numerous and painful its maladies and infirmities, will not perish if its members force themselves to enter with love into the designs of our Lord and abandon themselves to His guidance with entire confidence. More than this, I dare assert that it will prosper in the temporal as well as in the spiritual order, if not with glory, at least in truth.

SECOND POINT.

Sickness or infirmity promotes the spirit of penance when we seek to enter into the designs of God, and receive all things in a spirit of faith, as coming from His hand. It is certain that delicate health is more painful to support than a life of habitual penance. It is easier to fast and to abstain than to be subjected to all the miseries which accompany sickness; whence it follows that this

state can be more advantageous than health for the exercise of virtue. We feel such disgust for everything; we would wish to nourish ourselves with what augments our malady; what relieves it is so repugnant to us that we can take it only with great pain. We must subject ourselves to a diet, follow a certain treatment; drink things warm when we would wish to have them cold; remain in bed when we feel the need of a little exercise; we desire some relaxation or distraction, nevertheless we must remain in solitude, in silence; if noise disturbs us, we must support that which is made around us. Privations of all kinds, in the spiritual as well as in the natural order: we cannot follow the regular exercises with the Community, or if we can go to them, it is only with great pain. On whatever side we turn there are subjects of mortification and renunciation, besides the pains of the malady itself. Does not the spirit of penance find in all this much wherewith to nourish itself? The spirit of prayer also here finds food. In the sufferings of this weak state, can we not remember with profit the sufferings of our Lord and unite ourselves to Him? Can we not remember that having the misfortune to sin and to merit hell, it is a great happiness to have the means of doing penance here, of making reparation and of paying so easily our immense debts? In moments of temptation, discouragement, and complaints of nature, etc., is it not necessary to have recourse to prayer to obtain strength and all the grace needed not to succumb?

Yes, the soul in this state has constant need of prayer. When we are sick or weak and delicate, if we do not keep our heart continually raised above, it will sink into the mire of nature and we will scarcely know how to draw it out. The pains that are felt, the impossibility of distracting ourselves with our ordinary occupations, the sameness of the diet, the bitterness of the remedies, the service which is not always according to our liking, the treatment which does not suit us, then a number of little events and of minute circumstances, which at such times become for us important affairs, are as so many weights of lead which drag us into the mire of nature if we are not upon our guard, if we do not keep our hearts raised on high, and draw strength from prayer and from the union of our will with the Will of God. Oh! what a dif-

ference there is between a virtuous invalid and one who is not so! What losses for her who allows herself to be dragged down under the weight of human misery! the loss of all that she believed she had acquired in health, the loss of all the graces God had proposed to lavish upon her in sickness, the loss of the peace of her soul, and perhaps of her vocation!... and all for what? In order to restore her health which she ruins still more by the troubles she gives herself and the torments which agitate her.

What profit, on the contrary, for a soul who, elevated by prayer above all kinds of miseries, looks down upon them only in order to humble herself because of them. She trades advantageously with the little talents she had acquired in health; she seeks for and turns to good account the graces which God has hidden in her illness, in the remedies made use of, and in all that causes nature to suffer. The more miseries she meets with upon her way, the more carefully she raises herself towards God, making use of each one of them as of so many steps to reach perfection. This time of corporal infirmity is for her a time of spiritual riches on account of the union of her heart with the Divine Will. Her prayer which is almost continual, causes her life to become, by repeated acts of union and abandonment, but one act of loving abandonment into the hands of God. Happy abandonment which is the source of peace, of happiness, and of riches for the Religious soul!... Happy infirmity which causes the soul to enter into and to fix her dwelling in a state so rich, so abundant in all kinds of spiritual goods!... There she is sheltered from illusion, for the peace and happiness which we taste by abandoning ourselves to God in the time of sickness, of suffering or of humiliations, cannot be a delusion; it is the work of grace.

In this state also the spirit of zeal greatly increases. What power over the heart of God has not a soul who, in suffering, is truly abandoned to the Divine pleasure in union with our Lord! Can we not say with truth that when God wishes to employ a soul in some work for His glory, He seeks one who abandons herself to Him without reserve, because He knows that a sign alone will suffice to dispose her to execute His orders, through whatever messenger He sends them to her; and that as soon

as they will have been made known to her, she will immediately put her hand to the work, saying with Jesus: "Behold me, Lord, ready to do Thy Will;" and with Mary: "Behold the hand-maid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to Thy word."

Is it not by doing the Will of God that we glorify Him? And can we do this better than by surrendering ourselves to Him with true devotedness and love? Now, in time of sickness, this spirit of abandonment becomes still more excellent, because the exercise of it is more laborious and requires greater generosity. We must be clear-sighted in order to discern the good pleasure of God in many things which are painful and trying; we must have a generous heart in order to rise above all the demands of nature, to keep ourselves in a state of complete indifference in regard to things which concern us personally, and to have in view only the glory of God, the salvation of sinners and the good of all souls; and it is this which glorifies God so much the more because there are so many more obstacles to overcome.

Let us acknowledge with joy that perfect regularity in time of sickness or infirmity should necessarily make us grow in the spirit of penance and of renunciation, in the spirit of prayer and of union with God, and also in the spirit of zeal. Let us then conclude that to obtain these happy results we must receive all things from His paternal hand, go out of ourselves, make the miseries and consequences of our sickness so many steps to mount unto God, and to cast ourselves into the arms of His loving Providence, sincerely desiring nothing but His good pleasure and glory.

THIRD POINT.

Examples.

Let us contemplate our Lord in the Garden of Olives, crushed under the weight of His sorrow and anguish. What malady more overwhelming than this agony which makèth Him sweat blood! What relief does He take? What cares are bestowed upon Him? Where are the friends to console Him? He is alone!... A few steps away His Apostles sleep. Judas alone watches, but only to betray Him, to deliver His Master to those who have sworn His death!...

Again, let us contemplate Jesus covered with wounds, crowned with thorns, and loaded with His Cross. Who assists Him? Who dresses His wounds? Who offers Him any solace? They aid Him to carry His Cross; but it is not through compassion that they relieve Him of its overwhelming burden: they fear that He will expire on the way to Golgotha, and that will be too mild a death for Him. The hatred of His enemies thirsts for the spectacle of seeing their Victim suffer and die in the most cruel and ignominious tortures. In the meantime, the shouts for His death continue to resound in the ears of Jesus; they push Him, strike Him, and drag Him along with violence, so great is their haste to see Him nailed to the gibbet. And Jesus complains not; He is silent!... Ah, how eloquent is that silence! What a lesson of patience, of submission and of abandonment to the Will of His Father!

After such an example, can we complain in sickness! can we still find fault with what is done or not done for us! Who among us is treated as was our good Master? Around His Cross are insolent enemies who blaspheme, who scoff at and insult Him; around your bed of suffering is that charity which watches, which is eager to lavish its cares upon you. If things are not according to your natural taste, can you accuse another of ill-will? You dare not do so, because you know that charity reigns in the House of God. Where is the want of foresight, the want of readiness to aid you? Ah! look above; learn how to recognize and adore the Will of God Who, for ends most worthy of His love, renders powerless all the efforts of devotedness, and all the good will of charity. Jesus, from the height of His Cross, saw at His feet His tender Mother, Magdalen and His beloved Disciple, powerless to procure the least relief for Him. Thus had His heavenly Father ordained: thus does the Divine Victim accept it, thus does He will it; not a single drop of human consolation tempered the bitterness of the dreadful chalice so that our Redemption might be more abundant, and also that in no human sorrow, however desolating it might be, could we have the right to complain.

Our holy Mother St. Teręsa, who was sick or infirm during her whole life, knew how to raise herself above these corporal miseries and to profit by them in order to

advance in perfection. She assures us that she had learnt by experience that as long as we do not despise our health we can make no progress in virtue: "It seems to me, my Sisters, that it is an imperfection to complain of little ills. If you can endure them without speaking of it, do so for the love of God. When the evil is grave it will make itself known without your complaining and it cannot long remain hidden. Consider that you are only a few in number; if you love one another, and if you have charity among you, it will suffice for one of you to adopt this evil custom to cause much trouble to all the others. As to her who is really sick, she ought to say so and take the reliefs necessary; and if she is free from self-love she will feel so much pain at all kinds of dispensations that it is not to be feared that she will take them without necessity, or that she will complain without a cause...

"But what I desire of you, my daughters, is that you know how to support without complaining certain light pains, certain little ills of women. Often it is the demon who puts them into the imagination, when they only come and go. Now if you do not avoid the habit of speaking of them or of complaining of them, except to God, you will never finish with them. This body of ours is so bad that the more cares we lavish upon it, the more does it find out new wants. You would not believe how much it wishes to be flattered. The least necessity is for it a fine pretext; and thus it deceives the poor soul and prevents it from advancing in virtue. Think, my daughters, how many poor sick persons there are in the world who have no one to complain to. Do you wish to be poor and well treated? These two things do not agree...

"Let us call to mind our Fathers, those hermits who lived in past centuries and whose lives we pretend to imitate. What sorrows and what isolation! What did they not have to endure from the cold, from hunger, from the sun, from the heat, without anyone but God as a witness and confidant of their sufferings! Do you think they were made of iron? No, they were as delicate as we are. Hold it for certain, my daughters, that when we once begin to overcome these miserable bodies of ours, they will no longer trouble us so much. There are many others who occupy themselves with what is necessary for you; do you remain free from this care, unless there is

an evident necessity for it. If we do not resolve once for all to give up this fear of death and the loss of our health, we shall never do anything.

“Live in such a way that you may not have to fear your last hour, and abandon yourselves entirely into the hands of God, accepting all that He is pleased to ordain for you. What does it matter if we die? This body has mocked us so often; why then should we not in turn sometimes mock it? Believe me, such a determination is of more importance than you think. In truth, if with the aid of our Lord we come to treat this body as a slave, after some time we shall become mistress of it. Now, when this enemy has been overcome, we shall feel great courage for sustaining all the other combats of life. May God deign to grant us this grace! In my opinion, the advantages of such a combat are understood only by those who already taste the fruits of the victory; they are of such a price that if any one could understand them before possessing them, she would submit with a brave heart to the rudest trials in order to be able to exercise so great an empire over self and to enjoy so sweet a repose. . .”

Our Blessed Sister Mary of the Incarnation greatly edified all who saw her during her illnesses, which were very frequent and very painful. She always considered that they took too much care of her. “I am confused,” she would say to the Religious who came to visit her, “I am confused at the interest which you take in a person so inferior to yourselves in virtue.” Her heart was always united to God, and the Sisters who cared for her often heard the transports of love which came forth from this burning heart; never a complaint about her sufferings nor of the claims of nature. Far from asking for relief she only desired new sufferings. One day when she was very sick and they gave her a large crucifix to kiss, the Prioress wished them to present her with a much smaller one for her convenience; “not little crosses, my Mother,” said she. “What! to die without suffering! . . . I wish, Lord, to suffer unto the day of judgment, if such is Thy Will.” However, the Prioress, who could find no way of relieving her great pains, or-

dered her to ask God to alleviate them. The Blessed Mary fixed her eyes upon the crucifix and pronounced these words: "O my God! I can only ask Thee to preserve my life so that I may have the means of suffering much longer." Her pains ceased that very moment; but as they returned very soon the Prioress again told her to make the same request without, however, ordering her to do it. "That is not possible, my Mother," replied the invalid; "I ask, on the contrary, to suffer more."

We read in the Chronicles of the Order that in a Monastery of the Reform, a Religious, who was very sick and who had no other thought but that of profiting in a virtuous manner by his state, had a great disgust for all kind of food. His Infirmarian, who was very charitable but who had little experience, not knowing what to do to excite his appetite, conceived the idea of certain dishes more capable of killing the patient than of restoring his health, and he presented these to him with great joy, convinced that they were excellent. The Religious without examining what was offered to him, ate it in a spirit of perfect obedience, and God permitted that instead of being seriously injured by it, as must naturally have happened, he was perfectly cured.

In another Monastery, many of the Religious were together in the infirmary, and something that had become spoiled was served to them; not one of them complained nor made the least remark; not one of them left his portion, all ate it in silence as if it had been excellent

A Carmelite Novice being sick, a medicine which had been ordered was presented to her; but listening a little too much to her natural repugnance, she began by tasting it and immediately rejected into a dish what she had taken; she began again and did the same thing, always rejecting what she had just taken. When the contents of the bowl had thus passed into the dish, the Mistress of Novices, who was present, presented her this dish saying: "My daughter, you have just acted like a secular; now show yourself a Carmelite, and swallow at one draught what you were

not able to swallow little by little." The words of the Mistress gave such courage to the Novice that, surmounting her double repugnance, she drank to the last drop, and without rejecting, all that was in the dish; so true is it that a good will, aided by grace, can do what seems impossible.

How many examples do we not see of generosity in the lives of our Fathers and of our Mothers of the Reform; and how many miraculous examples of the Providence of God in their favor? Do we ever see the like worked in favor of those who only seek what is pleasing to them?

FOURTH POINT

Examen

Have we nothing with which to reproach ourselves upon the subject of dispensations from the abstinence of the Rule on account of sickness or infirmity? . . . Does not our conscience tell us that we have exaggerated our sickness or our weakness by using expressions which have made them seem to be greater than they really were, or by having made it understood that we would be exposed to murmur if we were refused that for which we had asked? . . . Have we not used artifices to obtain a dispensation for which we did not wish to ask directly, thus allowing ourselves to be deceived by the "old man" who persuades us that it is much more advantageous to be well than to be ill in Religion? . . . Overcome by this false principle, of what ruses, what expedients have we not made use to obtain permission for meat or some other relief, in such a manner that our desire was neither understood nor suspected! Was it not then that we complained of being in great suffering, that the ordinary nourishment far from strengthening us seemed to weaken us, . . . and that it was only by being able to recover some strength that we could go back to work, to the routine of ordinary life, etc. . . . What has happened? Meat and other reliefs have been given to us without any necessity for it; and we deluded ourselves still farther by congratulating ourselves upon being so well served without having asked

for it Thus, if we do not take care, we will deceive ourselves and remain in a state of fatal delusion.

But suppose that the reliefs given were legitimate, have we understood well that nothing can dispense us from abstaining from what nourishes and feeds the "ego," that we are obliged to observe this duty with greater rigor when we are dispensed from the other? How many times, on the contrary, under the least pretext of sickness or weakness, have we not given ourselves many liberties unworthy of a Religious, by seeking to satisfy our tastes, taking our ease, imposing our fancies upon others, having ourselves served like little princesses; complaining of the least omission, of the slightest negligence or little forgetfulness on the part of a poor Infirmarian who is overburdened with work, who gives herself no repose and who tries to find out all that can be imagined in order to do us good, without being able in the end to satisfy our demands? How many times have we ~~we~~ not testified, either by word or by an affected silence, our discontent on account of what she has let us suffer by not assisting us as soon or as well as we desired? . . . How many times have we refused what she gave us, joining to the refusal words that were not religious? How many times have we not by our manner reproached her for having prepared badly what she gave us, saying that this was why we could not take it, or why it made us so much worse? How many times have we shown discontent at the little skill of the Sister who prepared our food, and asked that a certain Sister rather than another might be charged with the care of it, because she could do it much better? . . . Do we see such self-seeking even in the houses of great lords? Is the cook changed there because an egg is not boiled just to the point, or because the soup is a little too salty?

How many times have we not exposed ourselves to great temptation by examining what was prepared either for ourselves or for others; by noticing the dishes, the cups, and other things in which our food was served; the ingredients which had been employed, the quality, the quantity of the sugar, or other sea-

soning which had been used, and the manner in which it has been given to us; making upon all these things comments which only served to give rise to repugnances for what was given to us, or sentiments of jealousy because of what was given to others?

Have we taken care not to give trouble, as the Constitutions say? How many times, on the contrary, without any regard for our devoted Infirmary-ians, have we made them go and come, descend, and ascend the stairs, arrange this, take away that, etc. . . . ; and, in return for so many services, not a word of gratitude, not a smile of satisfaction! . . . Do we willingly do without what the rich have in sickness?

Have we known how to rise above our infirmities, our weaknesses, etc.? . . . Alas! how many times have we not rendered ourselves more ill by force of examination, of thinking of our sickness, of its causes, of its consequences, of the the remedies used, of the precautions and cares to be taken, of the food, of the different impressions of cold, heat, hunger, thirst, and a thousand other little indispositions which go as quickly as they come? It is truly a pity to see all the explanations which result from this, and the influence it has upon the whole human machinery, which is put out of order so much the more in proportion to the oftener we reason upon so many little incidents of no other importance than that which we attach to them, and which would be of no consequence if we did not lose time in noticing and weighing them . . .

Have we taken into account the riches which we have lost in not profiting by the graces attached to a number of little privations and mortifications inseparable from the state of sickness? It is the time of an abundant harvest for the soul, and we have made of it a time of dissipation and of loss: a dissipation of what we have acquired in health, and a loss of what we might have acquired in sickness. To observe our conduct would it not seem that we have ceased to be Religious because we are ill? Does it not seem that we are no longer bound to renounce ourselves, mortify ourselves, or to observe any regularity? Does

it not seem that we may then seek all that is agreeable to our taste and satisfying to nature: to complain of all that seems to contradict us; make a great noise about a little soup which is too thick or too thin, about a little broth, the odor of which is repugnant to us, about a bed which is not comfortable, a nothing which annoys us, a window which is opened too much or not enough, a little delay in the execution of what has been ordered or of what we have asked? . . . Have we well understood that to act thus is to act entirely contrary to our true interest and to the designs of God, by putting the body before the soul, nature before virtue, matter before spirit, and ourselves before the Will of God?

How have we comported ourselves in regard to the physician? Have we shown a true disengagement and an entire indifference as to whether he came to see us or not, whether we were treated in such a manner or another? Have we replied simply to the questions which were addressed to us, without adding reflections and questions which showed too much of nature and self-love? How many times have we made known all the workings of our imagination concerning the cause of our sickness and the effects of the food and the remedies used; judging and deciding as if it were our own affair; showing attachment to our own judgment, to the ideas we have formed of our illness, of the treatment to be followed, etc.? Have we testified eagerness to be relieved and cured; asking for such or such a remedy or food in preference to what has been prescribed for us; showing discontent at the little success of the orders followed until then, saying that if we have been listened to, we should already have been out of bed, etc.?

How many times after the visits of the physician have we not accused him of possessing little skill or knowledge, turning into ridicule his person, his words, and his prescriptions, and murmuring against him? Have we not been wanting in simplicity by not replying exactly to the questions which he addressed to us, hiding circumstances which should have caused directions to be given contrary to our desires or to

our tastes? If, for example, out of fear for the diet which might be prescribed, we have only spoken in our account of the need we had of solid food without making known the heaviness which we felt after having taken it. . . .

Have we made use of religious expressions in the observations and questions which we have believed it a duty to make, after having recommended the matter to God as our holy Constitutions prescribe? How many times instead of saying: "If our Mother judges proper I will take such a thing, I will not do such a thing", have we not said positively: "I do not wish this I will not take that I will do such a thing, at such a time and in such a manner . . ."? How many times, instead of testifying regret and confusion at not being able to take the remedies prescribed, have we now shown ill-humor, saying that it was miserable, badly prepared, etc. . . . ?

Have we tried to return to our holy observances just as soon as we were able, but always with discretion and conformably to obedience? Have we not examined how others were treated? Have we not felt sentiments of jealousy or of satisfaction according as we believed ourselves to be better or less well provided for? Have we not wrongly judged the sick, the infirm, the Infirmarians, and even the Prioress, in regard to dispensations, diet and treatment, accusing some of being exacting, and others of negligence or of prodigality? . . . Have we taken advantage of all our strength to support our infirmity and to follow the Rule exactly in all things?

Well or sick, Infirmarian or infirm, have we always seen with the eyes of faith the Will of God in all things and referred all to Him? Have we sought to enter into His adorable designs in all the little events prepared by Divine Providence to make us practise at one time charity, at another renunciation and humility, etc.? Whence comes so much solicitude, so much apprehension, so much agitation about the future? Are we then in that state of abandonment into the hands of God which is the source of peace and of

abundant graces? Why so many desires? Why so many fears?

O, my God! how little have we understood the advantages of an entire abandonment into Thy hands! What treasures we have lost by constantly desiring something which is not according to Thy good pleasure, and by regarding with human eyes what we should have regarded only with the eyes of faith! Have we understood this well in the present meditation? Do we sincerely repent of the faults which we have just recognized? Are we sincerely resolved to live in a religious manner, in sickness and in infirmity as well as in health, occupying ourselves only in seeking the Kingdom of Heaven and abandoning all things else to the good God?

Lord, bless our resolutions and deign to add to the light which Thou hast given us, strength to put them into execution.

CHAPTER TWELFTH.

Exhortations.

Text. *As the life of man upon earth is a warfare, and all who will live piously in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour: endeavor, therefore, with all your strength to put on the armor of God, that you may stand against the deceits of the devil, having your loins girt about with the girdle of chastity and your hearts guarded with holy thoughts, for it is written: holy thoughts shall defend you. Put on the breast-plate of justice that you may love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, with all your strength, and your neighbor as yourself for the love of God. Take the shield of faith that you may be defended against all the fiery darts of the most wicked one, for without faith it is impossible to please God. Take unto you the helmet of salvation that you may hope to be saved through your Savior alone Who will save His people from their sins. Let the sword of the spirit which is the word of God abound in your lips and hearts, and whatever you do be it done in the Name of the Lord.*

FIRST POINT.

As the life of man upon earth is a warfare . . .

Here is an important truth upon which to meditate, a truth which well merits our greatest attention. If it is well understood it will cause many ill-founded troubles to disappear; it will give energy to the soul and make the practice of virtue more easy; it will enlighten the soul upon the means to be taken in order to live with more perfection; it will render it, so to speak, invincible with the aid of grace, without which we can do nothing, but with which we are stronger than all the enemies who can league themselves against us to destroy us. Yes, *the life of man upon earth is a warfare . . .* Only in Heaven can repose be found; here below there is continual war.

We have said elsewhere and we fear not to repeat it here: man has revolted against God; it is but just that all things should revolt against man. Everywhere we find enemies, within and without, in all places and in all times. At one time it is one enemy, at another time another; we

are very often assailed by all of them at one time, and are in great danger of being lost if we do not keep ourselves always armed against them. Never can we be able to say that we are secure and sheltered from their attacks, whatever may be the holiness of our profession, or to whatever state of perfection we may have attained; they will cease to war against us only when we have ceased to live.

Temptation is a consequence of sin, but by the mercy of God it can, in some sort, be a remedy for sin if we know how to profit by it; for the author of the *Imitation* teaches us that temptations are often very useful because they serve to humble us, to purify us and instruct us. We can say that temptations resisted form the sanctity of fallen man. The Saints are crowned because they have fought; they fought because they were tempted; and they were tempted because they, like ourselves, had enemies. But in order to combat them it is necessary to know them, to know where they hide themselves, what strength they possess, and of what tactics they make use. Our enemies within are numerous and indefatigable; we may even say that they are the most dangerous because all the others can do nothing without their aid. In effect, what can the enemies without, that is to say, creatures who surround me, which attract and lead me to sin, do, if my passions do not league with them to make me consent to evil? What can enemies who are above me, that is to say, spirits of evil who fill the air, be able to do if the enemies within are my prisoners and if my inferior nature is submissive to the superior? The demons are chained, they can only injure those who approach them; now, when do we approach them if not when we are governed by our passions?

Whence it follows that we should carefully examine what our interior enemies are, that is to say, what passions predominate in us and which of them places us in the greatest danger. Let us try to understand the degree of their strength, on what side they attack us; but above all let us not forget that, however numerous these enemies may be, whatever strength they may possess, we can always overcome them if we watch, if we pray and if we combat, with the help of grace. Again, let us not forget that there is no crown without a victory, no victory without a combat, and that the more combats we have to sus-

tain the more glory shall be given to Him Who aids and strengthens us by His grace.

Temptations should not astonish nor terrify us, and much less should they discourage us. Why should we be surprised at a thing which is common to all the children of Adam, and which we know to be inevitable and inseparable from human nature? *The life of man upon earth is a warfare* . . . Why should we be terrified at a thing which gives us occasion to combat for the interests of God, to testify our love for Him, and to draw upon ourselves His benevolence and His graces; why should we be terrified at what detaches us from earth, purifies us from the stains of our sins, aids us to avoid the pains of Purgatory, gives us the means of knowing ourselves and of understanding the need we have of God and of His grace; finally, why should we be astonished at that which leads us to pray in order to obtain this grace, which renews us in that fervor which is the mark of the elect and the special exercise of those who consecrate themselves more particularly to the service of God?

All this is expressed in our holy Rule in the point upon which we now meditate: *The life of man upon earth is a warfare, and all those who would live piously in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*. If temptations were to become our ruin and a subject of terror and discouragement, how should we interpret these words? Would it not seem that we were only braving danger in consecrating ourselves to God in the Religious life? Is it possible to admit such an absurdity? Who can believe that because we wish to serve our God perfectly, we fall infallibly under the power of our enemies and His! No, it is not so. Let us then understand things as they really are. It is true that we shall always have enemies; it is true that they will always war against us in proportion as we wish to belong more entirely to God; but it is also true that God is on our side, and if God is for us what have we to fear?

All who would live piously in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution . . . and why? This is as much as to say: those who enroll themselves in the army of such or such a Prince must expect to engage in wars. What is more natural? Is the Prince in question in want of soldiers, captains or generals, because this necessity of engaging in war is known to all? And if they have any heart, if

they have any love for their Prince and their country, will they recoil before this perspective. Will they esteem themselves unhappy or regard themselves as lost because they are called to combat for such a cause? No, certainly not; on the contrary, this duty is appreciated; they regard it as an honor, as a means of acquiring glory, and of proving their devotion to him whose interests they support . . . Much more than this, they glory in losing one of their members; they esteem themselves happy to lose even their life in the combat. Such are the sentiments which animate the brave heart. I do not say only of a general, of an officer, who have a right to expect some great recompense if they distinguish themselves in battle, but even of a sergeant and of a simple soldier who may be killed in the fight and of whom no one will take any notice. Yes, they long for the combat; their hearts palpitate with joy at the sound of a cannon; they burn with desire to show their love for their Prince and their country. To die in their bed, surrounded by the affectionate cares of their family, appears to them too unworthy a death. They wish to fall like brave soldiers upon the field of battle, with their arms in hand, while defending their King. Ah well! behold here our portion.

In entering Religion we enrolled ourselves under the standard of a King crowned with thorns, scourged, crucified, and Who, in this state, causes the infernal powers to tremble; of a King Who marches at the head of His army to conquer Heaven by combating the flesh, the passions, the world and the demons, who lay a thousand snares for, and incessantly attack those who follow Him.

We must then foresee those combats which we shall have to sustain, not to terrify ourselves and make us retrace our steps, but that we prepare for them by inflaming ourselves with a noble ardor and a generous devotedness to share in the difficulties of our Captain, to uphold His interests, to prove our love for Him and to procure His glory.

Since we are soldiers of Jesus Christ, let us show ourselves to be faithful and courageous soldiers. Let us regard it as a great happiness to be called to march after Him and under His command, to leave all things to serve Him, even to give our lives to sustain His cause. Let us think how glorious it is to be attacked on all sides solely

on account of our title of Soldiers of Christ, while this same Christ watches in our defense as if it were his own. Let us animate ourselves with noble and generous sentiments, let us go out of ourselves and out of the midst of our miserable passions; let us have nothing in view but the interests and glory of our Divine Master; let us seek to prove our love for Him by a devotedness without bounds. Then will the clamors of our enemies and the noise of battle no longer disconcert us; on the contrary, they will be to the ear of our soul like a warlike music which will cause us to fly to the combat and to sacrifice all things: repose, affections, health, even life.

Let us remember that the enemies of God, not being able to attack Him directly, attack all who belong to Him in order to rob Him, if not of His essential glory, at least of the accidental glory which He has a right to expect from His creatures and particularly from those who are consecrated to Him in a special manner. This is why they attack us, why they seek to snatch souls from God; and this is also why we, who are His soldiers, should always be in arms, either to preserve our Chief or to snatch other souls from the enemy and to restore them to their legitimate Sovereign. . . . Let us remember that the enemy never sleeps; our holy Rule again reminds us of this by the words which follow those we have just quoted: *Because your adversary the devil, like a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour.* . . . Yes, he roams around unceasingly to find out our weak side so that he might enter by it into our soul and cause its death; this is why we should also place vigilant sentinels at the doors of our senses and fight without truce.

It is essential, however, to notice one point on the subject of temptation so as to render our reflections more useful and more fruitful: it is that the temptations habitual to Religious souls, who desire to belong to God alone, are generally disguised temptations, against which it is necessary to use special weapons. A Religious soul is rarely assailed openly and in grave matters. The very sight of a sin would cause her horror and give her the vigor necessary to repulse the attack. But because we have no temptations of this kind, we must not infer that we are without enemies who are always occupied in causing our ruin; the soul which perhaps believes herself se-

sure is so much the more in danger of being overcome, in proportion as she mistrusts herself less. Yes, let us repeat it: the enemies of Religious souls do not come with weapons in hand in a great tumult and in full daylight. They come in the dark, hide themselves in ambush and catch us in a net; they disguise themselves, concealing their projects, and take, so to speak, our own ways of proceeding, the better to deceive us; and it is only after we have been caught that we discover their snares. Let us try to illustrate what we have said so as to be better understood.

The enemy has resolved, as I shall suppose, to make a soul fall into a sin of self-will. Will he present her at once with the thought of a formal act of disobedience to the Rule or to an order of her Superiors? No; for he would be immediately recognized and put to confusion. He surprises her in a very different way. Under the form of a good inspiration, he will insinuate to the Religious soul that she should do something better than that which she has been ordered to do; she will make the observation to her Superior with apparent humility, but with a little attachment to her own views. The Superior, who does not enter into her manner of seeing things, changes nothing in the order given. Nevertheless, the thing still appears better to the Religious; the enemy whispers in her ear that she has not been understood, that she should return to her Superior because the glory of God and the good of the house are concerned in it. She then returns to the charge; she insists; she discusses; she maintains her own opinion; she yields for a moment through deference, but only in order the better to recommence; or she keeps silence, but only to think of another means of having her own way. The enemy gaining ground, makes her think that, perhaps without disobeying, she can do things in such or such a manner in order to attain her end. She then makes use of artifices, turns and twists things until the order of her Superior is withdrawn or modified. Sometimes, too, obstinacy has a share in it: she complains, murmurs, forgets her duty, and persuades herself that hers is an extraordinary case in which she can dispense herself from obeying, etc. . . . See then how a poor soul can sin by self-will. . . .

Will the demon at first tempt the Religious soul to in-

fidelity to God or to her Rule? No; he is too cunning to proceed thus. He will begin by causing in this soul some slight repugnance for virtue or for Religious practices, and makes her consider the conduct of the other Sisters and of her Superior. This will not frighten her much. She will only repel it weakly; she will even occupy herself in judging it not to be wrong, and very soon the thing will appear lawful. If, on the contrary, she should feel some remorse, the enemy will persuade her that it is a vain scruple; or else that the thing being of such a nature should not be acknowledged to Superiors, that to act otherwise would be wanting in tact, draw down upon herself their ill-will, etc. . . . and there she is held . . . But the attack continues: she considers more closely what displeases her in them, she remarks their proceedings, she interprets their words and their actions; believing herself injured, she is disturbed, she is upset, everything goes wrong with her; she knows not how to obey; she no longer imputes to herself the faults she commits: others are the cause of them. All in the house appears in disorder, while the disorder is only in herself. Then doubts and irresolutions are manifested. She believes that she can no longer remain in this position, that she will lose herself if she continues in it. Her actions become more and more disorderly, more and more scandalous . . . finally, the fall is consummated.

Is there question of a particular friendship, that evil from which arises conspiracies and divisions in religious houses? The enemy takes care to present it only as a thing which is good, holy, glorious to God, and useful to the general as well as to the particular good. There is between two Sisters a sympathy of nature, they understand each other perfectly in spiritual matters, they see each other with pleasure, then they seek each other's company eagerly. Their conversations are often prolonged in contempt of the law of silence, always under pretext of a greater good; thus they easily excuse themselves. Very soon this is done at the expense of charity; they begin to speak of others in order to avoid, it seems to them, the faults which they point out; then they laugh at others and turn them into ridicule. They afterwards distribute the various offices according to their own liking among these and those Sisters, favoring some and

rejecting others: finally, even Superiors are attacked. Could things have come to this if at first the temptation had been presented under such aspects?

St. Ignatius says that the demon enters through our door in order to make us go out through his, and thus it is that he ruins so many Religious souls. He studies their spirit, even their attraction for good, and he favors this attraction by inspiring thoughts which correspond to it; in such a way that, if a little unexpected contradiction arises on the part of Superiors, they begin to reason, believing their salvation to be concerned in the matter, they cling to it, and so they go astray. Let us then mistrust ourselves very much; let us watch; let us try to recognize the enemy in his different disguises. That which appears good is not always so: that which appears desirable should often be repulsed.

But how can we discover snares so skilfully plotted? The impression made upon our soul is one of the marks by which we may recognize the temptation, and whether it comes from ourselves or from elsewhere. Thus trouble, agitation, eagerness, attachment to a thing which seems good, weariness, sadness and discouragement, are so many, symptoms which reveal his presence. We have then reason to fear some hidden snare when anything of the kind appears in us. A tendency to withdraw from our Superiors, a coldness in their regard, prove also that the spirit which animates us is not of God. To discern the interior movement by which we act is then a study of the greatest importance. St. Ignatius gives upon this subject sure rules which it is well to consult in order to apply them on the different occasions which present themselves, occasions which are so much the more frequent because life here below, particularly the Religious life, is but one temptation.

Let us learn then how to baffle the wily projects of our enemy: we can do this very well if only we will apply ourselves a little to the work. Let us see if calmness and the peace of God reign in our soul, notwithstanding such or such a humiliating circumstance, such or such a legitimate desire which pleases us, such a step which seems useful, such a request which we judge to be necessary, etc. Let us examine the different emotions of our heart in order to understand their character or to discover their

origin. The emotions which come from God are so sweet, so pure, so peaceful that we cannot fail to recognize them. In fine, let us submit in all things to those whom God has charged with the care of our soul; for thus shall we find the light necessary to discern what is good from what is not so.

But let us continue to weigh the words of our holy Rule. Foreseeing that our title of Soldiers of Christ exposes us to a continual war, knowing the combats we shall have to sustain, let us now see of what weapons we should make use.

Endeavor therefore with all your strength to put on the armor of God. Oh, how good God is! This word *endeavor* teaches us that it is not so much success as a good will which He asks of us. He does not say: make for yourself an armor, clothe yourself with it, make use of it; but only *endeavor with all your strength to put it on . . .*; that is to say: do what you can; employ all your good will; I ask only for that in order to charge Myself with the rest and assure you of the victory. Who then could draw back before a proposition so condescending to our weakness?

The Religious life is a life which tends towards perfection, rather than a perfect life; it is also a life of combat and of war, rather than a life of peace; and God in His goodness is content with our efforts alone; He takes account of this as if we had succeeded and He charges Himself with supplying by His grace for what we cannot do of ourselves. . . . *Endeavor then with all your strength* and with great confidence in this grace which is promised to us and which shall never be wanting as long as we are not wanting on our part. Let us endeavor then to put on the armor of God, that is to say, to practise to the best of our power the virtues which will help us to discover temptations, to combat them, and to make them turn to our own advantages as well as to the glory of God.

It is not our own weapons which can do all this but those of God. No, it is not in ourselves, alas! that we shall find the means of combating the enemies with which our bad nature might perhaps be happy to ally itself! it is certainly not creatures who will give us weapons with which to defend the interests of God and of our own

soul, when it is they who so often furnish us with those which do us harm! We can then be clothed only with the armor of God, that is to say, with the virtues which we practise with the help of His grace.

In order that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil. Without the light of God, how can we be able to discover these deceits, understand so much cunning, distinguish so many snares laid to surprise us? Without strength from on high, how can we resist our evil inclinations which draw us away in spite of ourselves; how resist our passions which excite us to evil, our temperament and our character which irresistibly influence our conduct to render it very often disorderly? How, without grace, can we resist all the enticements which creatures present to us to turn us away from God? How, without help from above, can we recognize and overcome the infernal powers, so superior to ourselves on account of their spiritual nature, their knowledge, their strength, their experience and their cunning? Our soul, so chained down to matter, so darkened in its understanding and so weakened in its will since the fall, and so enfeebled by concupiscence, cannot triumph alone; it requires an auxiliary: this auxiliary is the grace of God; it requires divine weapons: these are the virtues which are either infused or acquired by means of this same grace.

Having your loins girt about with the girdle of chastity. This is a powerful and terrible weapon, an angelic virtue which, drawing the soul nearer to God, renders it terrible to hell. The darts of the enemy cannot pierce a pure and chaste soul; they slip off from it as from a diamond. "Chastity," says St. John Climachus, "is a participation in the angelic nature." He who overcomes the flesh has overcome nature; he who has overcome nature is raised above it; and he who is raised above nature is not far different from the Angels. See then how well we can cast down our enemies by this sublime virtue; those enemies which I may call domestic: our flesh and our nature which are inclined to evil.

The infernal powers still remain; but if our domestic enemies are overcome, if the elevation of our soul in God shelters us from their blows, assures us of new victories, what have we to fear, while we take care to gird our loins

with the girdle of chastity? Who can make known all the precious advantages of this armor? No human intellect is capable of comprehending them, no tongue can worthily praise them. They who can best speak of this virtue are they who have practised it in the highest degree of perfection.

Many Saints have pointed out the beauty, the excellence and the advantages of it. Among others, St. Ephrem speaks of it as follows: "O Chastity, mother of the holy love of our Lord and condition of the angelic life! O Chastity which renders men like unto the Angels! O Chastity which fills the soul with joy, and gives it wings wherewith to fly to Heaven! Thou art the living source of spiritual delights and thou dost dissipate sadness and weariness! O Chastity, which restrains the ardor of the passions, and delivers the soul from trouble! O Chastity, spiritual chariot, which lifts him who possesses thee, like another Elias, to celestial and divine things, and which, like a beautiful rose, flourishes in the midst of the soul and body, embalming the whole being with the sweetest perfume! . . ."

Our Lord takes His delight among the lilies, He makes His dwelling in the pure soul: what more certain pledge of happiness and of salvation! What an advantage to have dwelling within us the King of kings Who Himself guards the citadel of our soul, expels from it the enemy, and establishes there all the virtues!

But if chastity is so precious, if it raises us so high, if it gives us so great an assurance of happiness in time and in eternity, we should not forget that its delicacy is so great that the least breath tarnishes it; and we should remember particularly that God asks of us a certain amount of labor to acquire it, and great vigilance to preserve it in its integrity.

The Masters of the spiritual life designate several means to be employed for this purpose, of which the principal are: prayer, humility, a guard over the heart and mortification. . . . The more sublime a virtue is, the more difficulties there are to surmount in order to acquire and to preserve it. Chastity is among this number because it tends to change, so to speak, our whole nature, by combating against it unceasingly, and by arresting in it the movements of concupiscence. "The other vices,"

says St. Jerome, "have their times for attacking us; but that of concupiscence of the flesh is so deeply rooted in us that it lasts always and gives us much trouble. It belongs only to great virtue and to great and careful vigilance to surmount our natural inclinations, to live in the flesh without the flesh, to be each day taken up with the care of ourselves and yet to regard this domestic enemy with the one hundred eyes of Argus in order to be on our guard against it." Yes, our soul, left to its own strength, is powerless to break the chains of such a captivity. The assistance of divine grace then is necessary, and this can only be obtained by prayer.

Prayer then is necessary to acquire and preserve chastity; this is the opinion of the Saints, to whom we shall listen with respect and submission of mind. St. John Climacus tells us: "Not one among those who practise the virtue of chastity and who have in a manner acquired it, should attribute the merit of it to himself; for, since it is necessary to rise above nature in order to overcome it, it is evident that such a victory cannot be the work of nature but that of its Author. He who persuades himself that he can cast down by his own efforts such an enemy as concupiscence, is like the one who wishes to bind a powerful man with a cord: he labors in vain. Neither our fasts nor our vigils are capable of destroying the edifice of our carnal inclinations, if God does not assist us in this work and does not aid us to build upon their ruins a spiritual temple where our soul may remain in security."

"Watch and pray," our Lord says to us, . . . "Pray without ceasing. . . ." We might perhaps be able to lay down our arms if, when once vanquished, the enemy could not return; but while we still remain upon earth, always exposed to his attacks, we also run the risk of being overcome. Let us then pray; pray, to attract from Heaven this grace, this powerful aid, with which we can do all things and without which our efforts remain sterile, particularly in combats against concupiscence. Is it not for this, that, in the daily prayer which our Lord Himself has taught us, we make the petition: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"? Who more than our Divine Master knows the weakness of our means of defense and the strength of our enemies?

Prayer has the double advantage of enlightening and of strengthening us: two things absolutely necessary for acquiring the virtue of chastity. Prayer, by causing us to draw near to God, the Sun of Justice, dissipates the darkness and the mists which carnal vapors spread over our soul; it enlightens us by showing us on one side the stains contracted and those to which we are still exposed; and on the other, the means of effacing the former and of avoiding the latter. This light, while enlightening the soul, also inflames the will; so that it desires means to acquire it and, feeling its own powerlessness, prays for them. Then it is that God finishes His work by granting the grace necessary to bring about that which we could never do of ourselves. Prayer, then, is the first means of acquiring chastity.

The second means, absolutely necessary, is humility, without which we can have no assurance of any virtue. Sins contrary to chastity are ordinarily the punishment of pride; whence we should infer that the virtue contrary to pride ought to be, in some sense, recompensed by chastity. Humility being a knowledge of the truth and flowing from it, it follows that an humble soul knows its weakness, its corruption and its powerlessness; it knows also the goodness of God and the power of His grace; this double knowledge leads it to mistrust itself and confide in God. If it gains some victory it knows that it is acquired by the operation of grace and not by its own efforts. It refers then to God the success of all its struggles against His enemies; because it knows with a knowledge of conviction that, without His help, it could do nothing.

It knows also that it is always possible for it to do evil, no matter what may be the degree of grace and of virtue to which it is raised, and that one moment will suffice to make it fall into the abyss if it wishes to use this unfortunate power. This certain knowledge cannot but keep it in a state of continual self-distrust which inclines it to humble itself before God to beg His aid with confidence and an intimate conviction of the need it has of it; and as God is pleased to communicate Himself to the humble He hears the prayers of this soul by keeping it chaste. "Acknowledge before God," says St. John Climacus, "the weakness of your nature; keep before your eyes your powerlessness for all good, and you will insensibly acquire

the gift of chastity." We can also say that if we cease to recognize our weakness and our powerlessness, if we glory in the victories we have gained and in the virtues we have acquired, a time will come when our girdle of chastity will fall from us as a punishment for our pride, our presumption, and our confidence in self.

Here a fatal experience speaks more eloquently than anything we could be able to say. Alas! how many lamentable falls after a long life passed in chastity! And wherefore? Because they did not humble themselves; because they trusted to themselves; because they took pride in their chastity; because they blamed, judged, condemned those who had not preserved this virtue; because they gloried in not having done the same. Ah! let us take great care not to glory in graces of this nature which God may have given us; let us rather fear that a want of humility, by withdrawing us from Him Who resists the proud, will despoil us also of the treasure of which we believed ourselves to be the peaceful possessors. Yes, let us fear that some shameful fall will teach us at our own expense what we ought to have reflected upon and known without forgetting it: that we are weak, incapable of any good, but capable of every evil; that the faults of others are also a light which shows us this truth, since we are of the same nature as they, children of the same father and subject to the same miseries. The moment that we forget this may be the one in which a terrible fall will cause us to remember it. Let us, then, pray continually, let us humble ourselves continually, because danger is also continual.

But to these two means must be joined a guard of the heart. The Holy Spirit warns us to watch over our heart with all possible care, because the heart is the principle of life: of the life of the soul as well as that of the body. The more perfect the heart is, the more perfect is life; the purer the heart, the purer is the life; we must, therefore watch over it with great diligence since upon it depends our life or our death. Yes, death enters through the windows of the heart, that is, the senses, if we do not close them with care. Let us avoid seeing, hearing and touching what can excite the passions and incline us to sin; let us fear to dwell upon thoughts capable of giving rise to dangerous affections, let us watch over the faculties of our soul, because if all there is well regulated the

heart also will be well regulated, and we shall possess life within us. If, on the contrary, there is negligence in all our faculties there will also be disorder in the heart and thence will follow the death of the soul. Let us watch, not only over the avenues of the heart, but also over its interior movements; let us seek out the causes of them, let us foresee their effects.

But, as the affections of the heart, whether good or bad, are formed only as a consequence of the thoughts which are presented to it, it is necessary to watch most carefully over these thoughts, to welcome those which are good, to banish those which are useless, and to repeal those which are bad. This exercise is one of the most important in the spiritual life in order to confound the enemies of our soul; and so our Holy Rule, after having directed us to gird our loins with the girdle of chastity, immediately gives us this advice: "Let your heart be guarded with holy thoughts, for it is written: holy thoughts shall defend you." We may conclude from this that, if holy thoughts defend us, evil thoughts cause our ruin. In effect, the consent which forms sin in the heart, takes place only in consequence of an evil thought, just as an act of virtue which is formed by the will, proceeds from a good thought, so that the more good thoughts we have, the more can we expect to produce good affections and good actions; and the more there are of evil thoughts, the more reason we have to fear that evil affections and sins will multiply. Behold how holy thoughts defend us, how they strengthen us against our enemies, who can never enter into the heart while holy thoughts occupy it.

However, it is to the purpose to remark that the occurrence of a thought does not depend upon ourselves and does not constitute either sin or virtue; what depends upon us is to examine this thought in order to receive or reject it. Again, let us remark that our vigilance in cultivating good thoughts makes us contract the holy habit thereof, which inclines us to a habit of all the virtues. The soul which flees from dangerous occasions, which mortifies herself, which examines herself, and which nourishes herself with prayer and good reading, can have habitually none but holy thoughts which strengthen her for the day of temptation; the soul which, on the contrary, allows herself to follow her natural instincts cannot fail to be assailed

by evil thoughts, or at least by those which are useless and which expose her to the danger of giving the enemy entrance into her heart.

We must, then, avoid all that can occasion evil thoughts, such as looks, conversations, reading, etc.; and we must, besides this, seek after all that can give us good thoughts, as we have just said. If, notwithstanding these precautions, one which is evil presents itself, we must repulse it from the beginning. "A guard of the heart consists first," says Cassian, "in perceiving the evil thoughts which approach or impress themselves upon our heart, in order to banish them immediately." St. Peter teaches us that we must crush ~~these~~ kind of thoughts "against Jesus Christ"; that is to say, we must stifle them by the thought of Jesus Christ, of His life, His examples, His lessons, and of His love, etc.

God has but one thought: His Word; all that He does, He does only through His Word and for His glory. We are created according to the image of God; our intelligence ought, then, to act according to this resemblance and have but one thought, that of our Lord, Who revealed Himself to us by becoming Man to facilitate for us the means always of occupying our mind and our heart with Him. Let us take care, therefore, according to the counsel of the Apostle, to crush against Him all other thoughts. Let the patience of our Lord, His humility, His charity, His obedience, His purity, in a word, all His perfections, furnish our hearts by turn with good thoughts which will preserve them from sin and make them acquire habits of virtue. The girdle of chastity will be given and preserved to us by this means. Thus holy thoughts shall defend us, strengthen us, and render us always victorious; for the thought of God will produce in us the fruits of virtue, destroy vice, put our enemies to death, and make our heart the dwelling of this Divine Word, Whom all within us will obey with love.

SECOND POINT.

A man of war, brought up in the camp, accustomed to a hard life, even to privations, shows himself a soldier in every encounter because he is one in the full sense of the word, and he is one because he loves military discipline, because he constantly studies to put it into practice, thus

perfecting himself more and more in the knowledge and in the exercise of what constitutes his profession. He handles his weapons with ease and uses them with skill; he endures the rigor of the seasons and seems almost insensible to pain; in a word, his language, his bearing, his actions: everything in him exhibits a man of war.

In the same way the Religious soul, who is a soldier of Christ, should exercise herself in combating with the arms which Religion gives her; she should make the observance of her Rules her chief affair, considering them as the expression of the Will of God. She will acquire, in this exercise, the habit of solid virtues which constitute a Religious; because the practices of penance and mortification become more easy in proportion as they are more frequent and more habitual. All in this soul shows what she is; the girdle of chastity which she takes care to embellish and to fasten more closely about her each day by vigilance and prayer, establishes her more firmly in this double spirit of penance and of prayer; the nourishment of holy thoughts gives her vigor and aids her greatly to detach herself from creatures and from herself. The habit of a pure and chaste life and of holy and virtuous thoughts, facilitates for her the power of receiving the communications of God, of entertaining herself with Him, of acquiring a more intimate knowledge of His Divine perfections and of uniting herself to Him more perfectly.

This soldier thus armed and fortified, becomes so much the more valiant as she exercises herself more in such a warfare. A first victory leads to a second; an enemy cast down serves as a step forward to attack another. She no longer seeks her own interest but that of her Divine Master; it is no longer her own glory that she ardently desires but that of her Prince. She forgets herself: her goods, her strength, her health, her life, all that she has is at the service of her King. She has but one affair: that of combating under His eyes and for His glory, that of conquering for Him a world, if she could. For this she combats alone; but when it is necessary to increase the battalions of the Lord, she associates with her-

self other soldiers, she raises and trains recruits, she snatches souls from the enemy. She joins watching to labor; nothing costs her anything provided that the interests of God be upheld. She reads in the eyes of her Chief what He desires and at once executes it. Here a defect is pointed out to her: her weapons are instantly directed against it. There a passion wishes to govern her: she at once engages in the combat . . . Or it is the demon who deceives and seduces a soul; and the zealous champion of the Lord presents herself to deliver that soul from peril by pointing out to her the snare which has seduced her.

Oh! how efficacious is this militant life for a Religious soul, especially for the soul of a Carmelite! It establishes her firmly in the spirit of penance, of prayer and of zeal which is the spirit proper to her Order and which she cannot acquire without incessant combats against the flesh, the world and the devil. Oh! what good reasons our holy Mother had for wishing to see us, not women, but soldiers! . . . What soul can raise herself truly above herself in order to belong entirely to God, by seeking herself, taking care of herself and giving herself rest? Perfect repose in divine union belongs only to Heaven. Here below there is war, combat, victory.

THIRD POINT

Examples

Our Lord is the most accomplished model we could contemplate or imitate. He came upon earth clothed and armed with all the virtues, out of which our holy Rule forms for us a spiritual armor; He came to teach us the use that we must make of them, how, on what occasions, and for what ends we should employ them. Ardent charity, humility of heart, extreme poverty, a devotedness without bounds: such are the arms with which He has cast down the infernal powers and confounded the world in order to conquer souls and to open Heaven to them. Although He had no need of laboring and of doing violence to Himself in order to gird His loins with the girdle of chastity, nevertheless, He acted as though He had

need of making efforts to do so, practising continual penance, imposing upon His nature the rudest privations, and never procuring for it any natural enjoyment. If he favors some few souls, they are those virgin souls like St. John who, because of this, had the happiness of reposing upon His breast in the Cenacle.

He was careful, nevertheless, not to despise nor rudely to repulse those who had lost this priceless girdle of chastity. What compassionate love did He not testify for Magdalen! How indulgent did He not show Himself to the woman surprised in this crime! The accusers of this latter no longer dared to condemn her after the Divine Master had shown by His words and example, with what humility, compassion and charity we should regard sinful souls! . . . When we see Jesus, purity by excellence, treating with so much commiseration souls that are stained in this way, who would dare again to despise or condemn those poor souls, often more unfortunate than guilty, but, at least, always worthy of pity? . . . We must ignore both the goodness of God and the corruption of our own nature to act in a manner different from our Savior.

St. Paul, that valiant soldier of Christ, also shows us in what manner we should make use of spiritual weapons. He felt the sting of the flesh; the demon dared to attack him in humiliating and terrible encounters; but clothed with the breastplate of justice, girt with the girdle of chastity, fortified by the thought of God and of His grace, he raised his eyes to Heaven, imploring with confidence and fervor assistance from on high; then he took into his hand the scourge of penance and he tells us that he did not strike as one beating the air, or at random, but that he reduced his body to subjection. This was because the law of sin was in him as it is in us. It drew him on to do the evil which he willed not, and prevented him from doing the good which he desired. "According to the inward man," said he, "I find pleasure in the law of God; but I feel in my members another law which wars against the spirit and holds me cap-

tive under the law of sin. Unhappy man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? . . .” While awaiting his deliverance, the great Apostle reduced to servitude a body which exposed him to offend his God. He expected all from grace, but with this grace he also fought, and it is this co-operation of his personal action with that of God which made of him one of the most famous champions of Christianity. Oh! how consoling it is, how encouraging to consider such models, to recognize in them the same obstacles which we have in ourselves and to find at our disposal the same help and the same means which have rendered them so perfect!

But let us never forget that without humility our virtue will always be very much exposed. How many holy souls have fallen for having presumed upon themselves! It is related that a virgin of Jerusalem, a recluse, who had lived during six years in very rigorous austerities, clothed only in sack-cloth, and refusing whatever could give her any pleasure, but conceiving a secret esteem for herself, she became unfaithful to our Lord and committed sin with the one who brought her food to eat. . . .

The Saints recommend us to drive away evil thoughts by those of death, judgment, and the pains of hell. This was the means employed by St. Pachomius in a like case. Another one said: “Solitary, if while reposing thou art attacked by evil thoughts: arouse yourself, walk, work, pray; ask of God that He might give to thee, knock at His door that He might open to thee; prayer should be thy refuge.” Yes, we must work and pray; we must, as St. Peter recommends, “dash to pieces against our Lord” these kind of thoughts, because the remembrance of this Divine Master is capable of warding off all the darts of our enemies.

Let us, then, beg Him to present Himself to us when He sees us preoccupied with some object which withdraws us from Him, as He did to our holy Mother St. Teresa. She was entertaining herself in the parlor with a person whom she loved and whose conversation was pleasing to her, without thinking

that she was doing anything wrong; our Divine Savior appeared to her with a severe countenance, giving her to understand by this that He was displeased: "I saw Him with the eyes of my soul," she tells us, "but more clearly than if I had seen Him with my bodily eyes; and the sight of Him remained so deeply imprinted in my mind that after more than twenty-six years, it seems to me that I still see Him present."

This example shows us: first, how jealous our Lord is of the heart of His Spouses, how He wishes it to belong entirely to Himself without any other affection, however virtuous, occupying it; secondly, how efficacious His presence is for detaching the heart from all created objects; thirdly, how willingly He allows Himself to be ^{discarded} ~~perceive~~ if only we use a little care in seeking Him with the eyes of faith, since He shows Himself even when we do not think of seeking Him. Let us, then, seek Him, and we shall have at least His grace if we do not enjoy the sight of Him. *end. Page 31*

We have said that flight from the occasions of sin is a means of preserving the precious girdle of chastity. It was our Lord Himself who made our holy Mother St. Teresa understand this in the circumstance which we have just cited as well as in several others. She gave herself no repose until the Enclosure of her Monasteries was strictly established and faithfully kept. For this reason she feared not to multiply locks and gratings. She wished that the parlors might seldom be frequented and she regulated the time and manner of seeing persons there. And all this she did with so much care and wisdom that she succeeded not only in maintaining great perfection in her Monasteries, but she even reformed that of the Incarnation of which she was elected Prioress many years after she had left it. Her biographer relates that while she filled this office there, her first care was to reform frequent visits to the parlors. A gentleman was accustomed to go there often to converse with a Religious, in a manner somewhat scandalous. Our holy Mother sent him word several times that the Sister was engaged and could not see him. Then the young man grew angry, and

asked for the Saint, who went to the parlor. She listened at first with much patience and humility to all his impertinance and the improper expressions which passion suggested to him; but soon, animated with that zeal for the House of God which consumed her, she reproved him strongly and with courage for daring to come to disturb and trouble the Spouses of Jesus Christ; giving him to understand that, if he continued to act in this manner she would notify the King of his conduct, and even take measures with His Majesty to have him chastised severely. These words of the Saint, pronounced in a tone of authority, made such an impression upon the mind of the gentleman that he retired without daring to reply; and not only did he not return to the Monastery, but this adventure, which became known in the city, induced his evil companions to imitate his prudent reserve. Thus it was that the Religious of the Incarnation perfected themselves in the love of our Lord, thanks to the enlightened zeal of their holy Prioress.

FOURTH POINT.

Examen.

Let us see if we are true soldiers of Jesus Christ, formed at the school of that great Saint who has enrolled us under her standard; let us see if we have the spirit of Teresa, if we know, like her, how to clothe ourselves with the armor of God that we might resist the snares of the enemy.

In what light have we regarded temptations, have we recognized the advantages of them? Have we known how to profit by them to excite our ardor, to render our heart magnanimous and to make good use of them for the glory of God and our own spiritual advancement? Thus does the good soldier act who sees in the struggle only a new occasion of testifying his devotion to his King and his love for his country.

Have we had recourse faithfully to the weapons of God? Have we not counted too much upon our own, that is to say, upon our personal efforts? Have we not sought distractions and consolations in creatures instead of drawing strength from prayer and the practice of virtue; instead of seeking light from those whom God has placed over us to direct and guide us? . . . Ah! if we had done so we should have been better able to recognize the

snarcs of the enemy and we should have had more strength to repel his attacks. But often, alas, through a foolish self-love we have hidden our temptations from our Superiors, thinking that we could triumph over them alone; and then a fatal experience has taught us that of ourselves we can do nothing.

What have we done to preserve our girdle of chastity? Are we convinced that a virtue so contrary to our natural instincts can only be acquired and preserved with the aid of grace? Have we been faithful to prayer, to the practice of humility, those two efficacious means for preserving chastity? Has it never happened that we have despised interiorly, or even exteriorly, persons who had not preserved this precious virtue? Have we not on this subject presumed upon ourselves, glorying in the thought that we have chosen the better part? . . . Have we had great compassion for the falls of others? Have we understood that we have in ourselves the unhappy possibility of committing the greatest crimes, and have we on this account kept ourselves in a state of mistrust of self, of humility, of the fear of God and of confidence in His goodness?

Have we guarded the avenues of our heart by mortifying our senses, repressing their curiosity, and submitting the flesh to the spirit? Have we watched over our thoughts which are the source of the good or bad movements of the heart? Have we rejected with care bad or useless thoughts? Do we carefully entertain good thoughts, either from our spiritual reading or from the remembrance of edifying things? Have we studied the movements of our heart in order to repress all those of which God is not the principle and the end? Have we generously broken all the little ties which attach us to creatures and to ourselves? Do we practise interior mortification by repressing the vivacity of our feelings and of our memory, whence spring desires and regrets, love and hatred? In a word, have we penetrated even to the root of our defects and our imperfections?

Do we occupy ourselves with pious reading? Have we taken care to make frequent ejaculatory prayers and to excite in our heart pious desires for the attainment of holy affections and acts of virtue? Have we fled from all dangerous occasions; such as, looks, discourses and visits

which could agitate our heart and preoccupy it, I do not say with things which are evil in themselves, but which are hurtful to the perfection of chastity? Little feelings of envy, of jealousy, suspicions which arise in us, easily disclose a want of humility and of detachment which are, nevertheless, so necessary for purity of heart and union with God. Oh! what trifles are still in this poor heart! how much dust tarnishes its brilliancy! Let us, then, cause order and cleanliness to reign there, that this sanctuary might be pure and worthy to receive Him to Whom it belongs by right.

CHAPTER TWELFTH—Continued

SECOND MEDITATION.

Text: *Put on the breastplate of justice that you may love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, with all your strength, and your neighbor as yourself for the love of God.*

FIRST POINT.

These words of our holy Rule do not permit us to forget the truth which we have remarked from the beginning: that the Religious life is a warfare and that we are soldiers combating unceasingly to defend our own interests and those God. After having given us a girdle as a mark of our profession and our resolution of being faithful to our King by combating until death: after having placed us in a well-guarded fortress into which our enemies cannot penetrate if we watch diligently, our holy Rule then gives us a breastplate to defend ourselves from the arrows which might be directed against us: *a breastplate of justice*, which is nothing else but charity, that is to say, the love of God and of our neighbor.

We have said that the life of man, and particularly of Religious, is nothing but a warfare, but what can injure the soldier of Christ, who has put on the breastplate of justice? . . . No enemy can have any power over the soul who possesses true charity: all his darts are dashed to pieces against it. But rather let us listen to St. Paul: "Who then," says he, "shall separate us from the love of Jesus Christ? Shall affliction? or distress? or hunger? or nakedness? or perils? or persecutions? or the sword? (As it is written: For Thy sake we are killed all the day long: we are as sheep destined for the slaughter.) But in all these things we overcome because of Him Who hath loved us. For I am assured that neither death, nor life, nor Angels, nor Principalities, nor Powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor any other creature can be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." This is the language of a true warrior who, covered with the breastplate of justice, defies all possible armies to conquer him. He feels strong in this defensive armor; he awaits all attacks, from whatever side they come, he is sure that they cannot injure him. Yes, charity renders our soul invulnerable, because

God Himself takes the defense of those who love Him; now if God is with us who can be against us?

It is, then, very advantageous to put on this breastplate, and we should do it: first, for the glory of God; and secondly to forward our own interest.

First, we have said elsewhere that God is glorified by our submission to His orders. Now, the first and greatest of all His commandments, His most expressed Will, is that we should love Him with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our strength. To accomplish this, therefore, is to glorify Him as much and even more than by obeying all His other commandments. St. Paul teaches us this with His usual energy: "Though I should speak", says he, "with the tongues of Angels and of men and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. Though I should have the gift of prophecy, be able to understand all mysteries and possess all knowledge, and though I should have faith enough to move mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I should distribute all my goods to the poor and deliver my body to be burned, if I have not charity all that will profit me nothing." Then defining in a wonderful manner the characteristics of this great virtue, the Apostle adds: "Charity never faileth; whether prophecies shall be made void or tongues shall cease, or knowledge shall be destroyed." Thus it is evident that however sublime may be the actions we perform, if we have not charity it is as if we had done nothing, for charity alone can give value to our works. Without it nothing is great; with it nothing is little: a glass of cold water given through a motive of charity will glorify God through all eternity, while miracles, operated without charity, cannot prevent their author from falling into the abyss. The measure of our love is, then, the measure of our perfection.

To love God is a thing so just that if man had not been depraved by sin his heart would turn spontaneously towards God, loving Him, and loving Him more than all things, as much for His infinite perfections as for His titles of Creator, Father and Sovereign Lord. The soul of man, in the state of primitive innocence, understood all these things in such a manner as to feel naturally inclined towards this Object, alone worthy of attracting his atten-

tion and his love. The heart of man when innocent and pure, having been created with a capacity corresponding to this Divine Object, was filled by It and with divine charity. Then the commandment of love would have been a law which each one would have imposed upon himself spontaneously, as it were; it would have been an attractive law for which there should have been no need either of menaces or of promises. Things would have been here as they are in Heaven, where charity is the universal, eternal and sovereign law. But, sin having turned us away from our end, having extinguished charity within us, it was necessary that our Lord should make it an express Commandment for us to love Him, and that He should come upon earth to enkindle this fire. And this is why "the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us". . . . Unheard of prodigy of the charity of a God, most proper to enkindle love in the hearts of all men! Charity then, has become a two-fold act of justice. By rendering to the Son of God the love which is due to Him, we glorify God the Father Who has given Him to us for our ransom; and we glorify Him so much the more when we love Him in union with His Divine Son.

Secondly, our own interest also makes for us an obligation of the precept of love, since in observing it we are sure of possessing forever more riches, more happiness, more glory, than our hearts can desire. Charity is the treasure for which we should sell all that we have and with which we can acquire the Kingdom of Heaven and an immense weight of glory. Thus, as we have already said, it gives a value to all our works: is it not then very easy to enrich ourselves, by doing all things purely for the love of God? Since nothing here below can content nor perfectly satisfy our heart which has been created for God alone, if we establish His reign in us by charity, do we not enjoy even in this life an immense and solid happiness? Is it not at the same time to acquire that of Heaven which nothing can disturb? Finally, since we naturally love glory, (sometimes even seeking it where it is not to be found,) and since the only true glory is to be loved by God, to love Him and to serve Him, if I am united to God by charity, my soul participates in His glory, the proper end of love being to put all things in common between the lover and the object beloved. . . .

But we shall not dwell longer upon these considerations; the children of Carmel, whose vocation is entirely one of love, are taught as it were instinctively the obligation and advantage of this divine law. What is of importance to us is to study in prayer the means of acquiring such a treasure and of profiting by it. It is this which should occupy our whole life. Yes, pure love, practical love, ought to be the very life of our soul, as the soul is the life of the body. Let us see how we can purchase from God this pure gold which will put us in possession of the heavenly Kingdom.

Heaven is nothing else but the possession of God; charity is the golden key which opens to us the gates of this Kingdom; and this pure gold of charity we must obtain, at whatever cost, from the God Who calls Himself "Charity". . . O my God! since Thou alone canst put us in possession of such a treasure, how and at what price may your poor creatures obtain it? . . . I know that, in Thy merciful goodness, Thou dost not require riches equivalent to those which we ask of Thee; Thou art content with the most humble of offerings; Thou dost accept, in exchange for an inestimable gift, those of our poverty, that is to say, some slight sacrifices. . . But, can we call by this name offerings made to God of what belongs to Him by right?

But, having created us free, He deigns to accept as a sacrifice, what we offer Him of our own free will and with a good heart. Mortification of the senses, of the mind and of the heart: such is the money which He accepts in exchange for His love. Ah! let us not be miserly with Him so that we may respond somewhat to His great generosity.

It is easy to understand that mortification augments charity within us. The disorder which sin has introduced into our whole being causes our faculties, by following their natural inclinations, to fill our hearts with vanity, corruption and sin, which do not permit charity to enter therein. The work of mortification, by restoring these faculties to their primitive functions, empties the heart of all imperfection and, by this means, leaves it free to be filled with God. But that mortification may work this change effectually, it must be enlightened and sustained

by prayer; and this is the second means which facilitates for us the acquisition of charity.

To love an object it is necessary to have some knowledge of it, the heart cannot love that of which it is ignorant; again, it is necessary that this knowledge should not be superficial, but deep and earnest, for the more intimate it is the truer is the love. Now, who can flatter himself that he knows God and loves Him, if he does not, by meditation, apply the faculties of his soul to consider Him in all His works, in the natural and the supernatural order, or again, to consider Him in Himself and in His divine operations? . . . I know well that God can in one moment, if He so wills, ravish our soul even to the third Heaven, as He did St. Paul, and there give us an infused knowledge far above that which we could acquire by our own labor; but such is not the ordinary conduct of God in regard to souls.

He has given us spiritual faculties that we might employ them to seek Him, to know and to love Him, in the same way that He has given us corporal faculties to employ them in His service. To seek by meditation to know God is, then, a duty; this knowledge gives rise to holy desires of love, it excites the heart to pray, to solicit this grace, and to act in such a manner as to obtain it; for a deep knowledge of the perfections of God leads us to the knowledge of our own misery and powerlessness, whence comes the need we feel of having recourse to Him to obtain from His mercy what we cannot claim from His justice.

But what do I say? The Divine Wisdom has made justice to accord so well with mercy that we may, in some sort, demand love of Him as a thing which is due to us. Has not our Divine Savior said: "Seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you; ask and you shall receive"? What can be more positive? . . . Let us, then, seek by meditation and prayer, and knock by mortification. God has engaged Himself, He has given His Word; we shall have what He has promised to us. The more our soul opens itself to love, the more will it be replenished with charity; the measure of our hope will be the measure of our gain: this is also a promise of our God. If I ask only for a little love, I have a right only to the little I have asked; if I beg for much, much will be

granted me; and if I desire and ask for the perfection of charity and the heroism of pure love, I can feel assured of having it one day, because God has promised it and He is sovereignly faithful to His promises. But, on our part, let us also be faithful to the conditions imposed, let us make our offerings proportionate to our desires; if we wish to attain the perfection of charity, let us put no limit to our sacrifices, let us immolate the victim entirely, without reserving the smallest portion; and let our prayer also be continual.

One thought ravishes me while tracing these lines, To tend to the heroism of love by the heroism of immolation.

. . . ; to meditate day and night on the law of the Lord. . . ; to watch in prayer: is not this the whole of my vocation? Provided that I am faithful, I may be certain of acquiring the perfection of charity, according to the promises of my God. This glorious perspective thrills my soul and dilates my heart! . . .

In order to profit by this meditation, it is necessary to understand in what the practice of love consists. We are here naturally inclined to be caught, and to delude ourselves by taking feelings for love, while love consists, not in feelings, but in works. We often think that we love God because we enjoy some consolations, when all things seem easy to us, when the heart is softened and throbs, when nothing contradicts us nor causes us any pain, when it seems that we taste by anticipation the spiritual joys of heavenly beatitude. Alas! what an error! Even though these sweet and consoling feelings were not an effect of our temperament or a deception of the devil, but a real divine operation, could we say that we love God? Let us remember, then, that the proper end of love is to give one's self, to communicate one's self to the object beloved. In these supernatural and consoling operations, what do we give to God? Is it not rather He Who gives to us, because He loves us; while we do nothing but receive? Ah! let us not deceive ourselves here: while God sometimes favors in this way souls who love Him generously, He often so favors those by whom He wishes to be loved and whom He knows are too weak, too tepid, to be determined, without this stimulant, to love Him in earnest.

But even if this were a recompense of love, it is always true to say that it is not love itself, nor is it its nature.

On no page of the Holy Gospel shall we find that he loves in truth who is bathed in consolation, who is enlightened with supernatural lights, who tastes perfect repose in divine union. On the contrary, we find there in simple terms, which are within the reach of all understandings, that "he who loves truly is the one who does the will of God"; that "blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice sake"; that "the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence". Now, beatitude, which is the Kingdom of Heaven, is nothing else but the possession of God which we acquire by pure love. What is it to do violence to ourselves if not to be in a state of continual war with self, by restraining our inclinations, our character, our passions, etc.? What is it to suffer persecution for justice sake, if not to be a mark for the attacks of our enemies, to be assailed by all sorts of temptations, to combat without ceasing to prevent the citadel of our heart, where charity resides, from being invaded? What is it to do the Will of God, if not to act continually against our own will and our natural inclinations, since the Will of God is that we should practise virtue? (Virtue, a word signifying strength, leaves us no doubt as to the painful and laborious exercise to which it subjects us.) Then, to suffer for God and to do His Will, is to love Him truly; it is to give Him the most excellent proof of our love.

The practice of love has several degrees which we shall reduce to three, and which correspond very nearly to the three degrees of humility according to St. Ignatius, and which I find in these three teachings of our Divine Master: "If thou wilt enter into life eternal, keep the commandments."—"If thou wilt be perfect, sell all that thou hast."—"If thou wilt be my disciple, renounce thyself, take up thy cross daily and follow Me. . ." I am not, therefore, permitted to believe that the practice of love consists in repose and consolations, although I know well that sacrifices made for God lead to a repose and to joys unknown in the world; but I say again that these are not the effects of practical love. Let us now examine its degrees.

The first degree is absolutely necessary to enter Heaven: that is, "To keep the commandments". To say this one word to a wordly soul, eager for pleasure and enjoyments, is to terrify her by the sight of sacrifices which

she judges to be necessary for this. She must, in effect renounce sin, give herself up to the practices of Religion which contradict nature and humble self-love; she must even sever certain attachments: all so many sacrifices that cost her much. To observe the precepts of Religion and to work out her salvation, this poor soul must offer continual violence to herself. In beginning to serve God by the practice of the commandments, she begins to love Him, according to this maxim of our Sacred Books: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom", that is to say, of charity reduced to practice. Thus to fear God in order to avoid the misfortune of losing Him, to observe His law by renouncing sin and all its occasions, such is the first degree of love: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. . . ."

"If thou wilt be perfect, sell all that thou hast. . . ."
 Here is a new step to mount, and consequently a more elevated exercise of love. Here, the soul does not limit herself to the observance of the precepts, she attaches herself to that of the counsels, and she increases the number of her sacrifices. She no longer renounces mortal sins only, but also venial sins; not only things which are forbidden, but even those permitted, the use and possession of which, however, could expose her to lead an imperfect life. The principal exercise of this second degree of love consists, then, in detaching ourselves really and in affection from all the goods of earth which we could lawfully possess, but which love desires to sacrifice to God; to renounce carnal joys, the pleasures of the senses, all affection to creatures which soil, however little, the purity of the soul. This supposes great combats between nature and grace, a severe practice of mortification, continual prayer and indefatigable vigilance; and finally, great exactitude in our spiritual exercises, particularly that of the daily examen, which makes known and aids us to correct our faults, to regulate our interior and exterior movements, especially those of the heart so that it may form only holy and virtuous affections.) Love, then, has here much to give, much to ask, much to immolate. It must be always in action, because from the moment that it stops in its course it loses a part of what it had acquired; as also the more it acts the more is it strengthened and developed, and the more it extends its dominion over the

soul. Thus it is that we finally reach the third degree expressed by these words of our Lord: "If thou wilt be my disciple, renounce thyself, take up thy cross daily, and follow Me. . . ."

Thus, as we have just seen, in the first degree of love we wish to be saved and we sacrifice for this end only what is absolutely necessary. In the second, which tends to higher perfection, we sacrifice a great many things, even those which are permitted. But in the third degree, which makes us disciples of Jesus Christ, we renounce our own will, we forget ourselves, we put no bounds to our sacrifices, since we immolate ourselves entirely, in quality of a victim, for the love of God, after the example of our Lord and in union with Him. This is properly the degree to which a Carmelite should tend; and it is this which requires from her a continual exercise of vigilance and of prayer so as to find out and destroy all that can oppose her union with our Lord.

The disciple should resemble his Master. To imitate Jesus we must, then, listen to His lessons, watch His actions and compare them with our own, and labor to render our conduct conformable to His; in a word, take up our cross and carry it after Him. . . . "Follow Me", He says to us. And where must we follow Him? Everywhere that love leads him. We must follow Him in His poverty, in His humility of heart, in His gentleness, in His patience, in His obedience, in His devotion to the glory of God and the good of souls, in His labors and humiliations, in His sufferings, in His passion, even in His death. . . . Our Lord has passed through all these states to accomplish the Will of His Heavenly Father; He has passed through them without any consolation. . . . According to the energetic expression of our Sacred Books, He was a Man of sorrows, the reproach of men, treated as a worm of the earth, abandoned by all, yea, even by His Father.

Behold the practical exercise of charity in Him whose disciples we wish to be; behold, consequently, what we should do after His example and with His help. Is this really the idea we form of love when we speak of it, when we ask for it and when we seek it? . . . Our Lord in His wisdom could not find a better way to testify the love

He bore to His Father and that which He bore to us; and this is why He says to us in three words, to make us imitate Him: "Renounce thyself. . . ; carry thy cross. . . ; follow Me. . . ."

The better to convince us that this is the practice of true love, the Holy Gospel tells us that "not all those who say: Lord! Lord! shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but those who do the Will of our Heavenly Father". Now the Will of God is that we walk in the footsteps of His Divine Son. He has sent Him upon earth to show us the way to Heaven through a pathway of thorns and briars, of humiliation and suffering, that we may have no pretexts to allege for not walking in this way, that His voice and example might encourage us; that His grace and His bloody footprints might strengthen us. And then, beholding the submission of this only Son in the midst of so many hard labors endured for His love, He made His voice heard from the heights of Heaven to make us understand His sentiments and desires: sentiments of affection for Him Whom He called His beloved Son; desires of seeing us associate ourselves to His labors as well as to His love: "This", says He, "is my beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased: hear ye Him". And of what did our Lord speak at the moment when His Apostles, ravished out of themselves, wished to remain upon Thabor? Of His sufferings, of His passion, of His death. . . Ah! if we wish to love God truly, let us imitate this Son Who loved Him so much and Who was so tenderly loved by Him. Love is proved by works, works which tend to our own annihilation and to the greater glory of God.

Our Lord had nothing but this glory and the accomplishment of the Divine Will in view. The sole remembrance of this adorable Will recalled Him to life in His agony in the Garden of Olives, and made Him enter upon the road to Calvary. Every consolation was wanting to Him in His greatest sorrows; but for Him the thought of the Will of God always supplied for this; it was the only thing to which He desired to have recourse, the only thing which animated His courage and gave Him strength. Let us constantly study this Divine Model; let us force ourselves to become His faithful copy. In all circumstances which are contrary to nature and painful to self-love, let us cast a look upon this Model, let us give a

stroke of the brush to the copy, and little by little the work will be done.

Let us subdue the "old man" by the practice of renunciation; let us force him out of his innermost stronghold, so that he may no longer have any power over our soul; let us draw nearer to God by the practice of solid virtue: finally, by our works, our prayers and our desires, let us tend to our own annihilation in order to establish upon these ruins the reign of pure love. See here what should be for us the practice of charity; this is the breast plate of justice which places in nothingness that which is nothingness, and which renders to God all His rights; this is the armor with which, like St. Paul, we may feel assured of being invincible.

If affliction assails us, a glance upon the Object of our love will prevent the dart from piercing our soul or injuring it; on the contrary, it will be a means of uniting us more intimately to our Lord. If anguish comes to discourage us, and we cast this same look of love upon Jesus agonizing, making an act of submission in union with Him, behold our soul is reanimated, strengthened, and enriched with heavenly graces. If the privations of nature, the miseries of life to which poverty exposes us are a source of temptation, love will make us view them all as a benefit and a means of offering something to God; very far from complaining and murmuring, we will bless our Lord because He allows us to share in His privation and in His merits. We are, perhaps, exposed to some danger of body or of soul in the employments which are given to us: love, which makes us see in this the order of God, His Will and His glory, assure us that we shall be assisted and preserved from danger, and that all will turn to our advantage; because God takes care of the interests of those who love Him and who generously expose themselves to danger to accomplish His Will. Persecution, the sword, present themselves in their turn to terrify us and make us retreat: love is there to remind us that this is the moment to show ourselves faithful and devoted soldiers of the King of Martyrs; and, far from recoiling, we shall go on with joy, sacrificing to God our repose, our reputation, our blood, our entire being, if necessary.

Yes, with love and through love, we may feel assured that neither the fear of death nor the love of life can

make us consent to sin. With this practical application of charity, the future will cause us no apprehensions, no eager and unquiet desires. To suffer, to act, to be silent through love: behold the exercise by which the soul, being always virtuously occupied, constantly receives abundant graces that she may not be overcome by any temptation. O divine charity! O precious breastplate! when shall we be covered with thee! . . .

But, so far, we have only regarded charity under one of its aspects; it remains for us to consider a second. When we shall have learned to love God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our strength; then we must love our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. This second commandment is like to the first; it is so closely united to it that we cannot perfectly observe one without observe the other. The Apostle St. John said to his disciples: "My little children, love one another." And behold the reason which he gives for constantly repeating these words: "It is the commandment of the Lord; provided it be accomplished, that will suffice." Here, then, is the first, the most powerful, and, I might say, the only motive for loving our neighbor: God commands it! it must be, then, that He has good and excellent motives for imposing this precept upon me. Now, if I love God, I ought to obey Him in what He judges proper to command, for this reason alone that it is He Who commands. Moreover, Jesus Christ came upon this earth to renew this precept and to make of this love a new commandment. In order to teach it to us by His example He clothed Himself with our humanity; He passed His life in poverty, humiliation, labor and suffering; and, finally, died upon a cross. Can my heart refuse to submit at the sight of such an example? Ah! no.

To excite within us a love of our neighbor, we should consider him as a man endowed with the same nature as ourselves, a child of the same Father; we should regard him as a Christian, regenerated, like ourselves, in the Blood of our Savior, nourished and strengthened by the same graces, called to the same glory; we should think that, as a Religious, he has

been favored, privileged with the divine call and that he is, like ourselves, a disciple of our Lord. Assuredly, these considerations, deeply meditated upon, cannot but dispose us to love our neighbor. But it seems to me that for the heart of a Religious who tends to the perfect observance of the Law, the most touching, the most persuasive consideration, and one most fruitful in happy results, is that of the love with which our Lord has given us this commandment, the love with which He sealed it in His Blood, and with which He wishes that we should accomplish it. Here we find, not only powerful motives of charity, but also the character and the measure of this virtue, and the manner in which we should practise it.

The characteristics of true charity, which St. Paul traces out for us, are all found in their highest perfection in the love of our Lord for men. "Charity is patient, is kind; charity envieth not; dealeth not perversely; is not puffed up; is not ambitious; seeketh not her own; is not provoked to anger; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things; believeth all things; hopeth all things; endureth all things." Who does not recognize in these characteristics the charity of Him Who alone was able to say: "Love one another as I have loved you!"

Let us now compare our charity with that of this good Master; and let us blush at finding it so little conformable to His; then, let us examine what means we should take to acquire a true love of our neighbor. Here, among others, are a few precautions which will aid us to do so.

We must: first, avoid with care all detractions and evils of the tongue, as also all words of complaint, of murmuring, of bitterness and of revenge. Secondly, if we cannot avoid seeing the defects of others, let us patiently support them, according to the counsel of the great Apostle: "Bear ye one another's burdens." Thirdly, to abstain from all curious research into the conduct of others, whence arise suspicions, jealousies, false or rash judgments. Fourthly, never to judge others: "Every man is a liar," as the Holy

Scripture tells us, and consequently subject to deceive and to be deceived; to God alone, Who is the Eternal Truth, should we leave all judgment. Let us, then, blame evil in itself, but never let us condemn anyone, for fear that God shall in turn condemn us. Fifthly, to occupy ourselves carefully with our own duties towards God, because spiritual idleness engenders a thousand faults against charity. By employing all the faculties of our soul in the amendment of our own life, we shall have neither time nor even the thought of casting a look upon the conduct of others, at the expense of that love which is due them. Sixthly and lastly, to pray for the needs of our brethren, for the conversion of sinners, for the spiritual advancement of the just, for the Pastors of souls, for Missionaries, etc. . . . Let us aid our neighbor, not only by prayers, but also by our example; let us render him all the services in our power. God commands it; the Rule prescribes it; and our holy mother St. Teresa feared not to say that if we do not do this we are not Carmelites.

It is true that we can neither preach, nor exhort sinners, nor instruct the ignorant, nor take care of the sick, who are the suffering members of Jesus Christ, nor give ourselves up to the exterior works of charity, but we can and should always pray, suffer and immolate ourselves with our Lord for the exaltation of Holy Church and for the good of souls. We can and should cause fraternal charity to reign in the House of God by our patience, meekness, mutual forbearance, thoughtfulness, humility, etc. Yes, charity must unite all the members of a Community just as by cement the stones of an edifice are held together.

But let us not deceive ourselves: this virtue requires of souls so complete an abnegation of self that it renders them deaf, blind and dumb in regard to the defects of their Sisters. It requires particularly a great vigilance over our thoughts and sentiments, because from thoughts spring forth aversions which are, in their turn, an occasion for words contrary to charity. Now these words, like so many sparks of fire, cause a conflagration which in a short time devours and ruins a Community. In effect, by communicating the venom of prejudice or of little intimacies, we lose that sincere esteem which we ought to have for one another and without which there is nothing

but suffering and trouble in the relations of members among themselves; by this door disunion enters; then follows death. . . O Charity, precious Charity! mayst thou be always in our mind, in our heart, in all our actions, in all our exterior intercourse, that all within and without us may be perfumed with thy fragrance!

But that the interior and exterior practice of charity may be well regulated, let us see in what manner we should observe it and what limits we should assign ourselves. The words of the law of charity are clear and precise: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."—"Do unto others as you wish others to do unto you".—"As you measure unto others, so shall it be measured unto you".—"Judge not and you shall not be judged".—"Forgive and you shall be forgiven".—"Mercy shall be shown to the merciful" . . . etc. We are, then, sole judges in this matter and consequently free to prescribe or not to prescribe bounds to our charity. If paternal love, or any other kind of love, had been given us as the model of that which we owe to our neighbor, we could easily withdraw ourselves from the commandment, under the pretext that we are ignorant of such feelings. But, in telling us that we must love our neighbor "as ourselves", our Lord has taken away from us all excuse; the measure which He prescribes is within the power of each one of us and it is very easy for us to understand how to apply it.

Moreover, we must love our neighbor as ourselves "for the love of God". Behold the letter of the law. This second clause was necessary in order to direct our love. We are so inclined to be deceived here, to love creatures for themselves and not for God, that it is important for us to be warned that our affection for them should refer to God, and thus become purified.

We should, then, love in our neighbor what God loves; as He loves him and because He wishes us to love him. Our charity thus becomes supernatural, without taking account of the motions of sympathy or antipathy, it sees only God in souls and souls in God: rich and poor, great and little, learned and ignorant, Saints and sinners, have an equal right to its love.

Without entering into all the definitions of the different degrees of love for our neighbor, let us limit ourselves here to examine well to what this commandment obliges

us, how we should practise it in regard to our neighbor in general, and then in particular towards those who surround us; and the manner in which we may easily make the application of the above rule in the multiplied occasions with which we meet each day.

It is well first to remark that, if we are not masters of the first movement of aversion or of natural attraction, it is always possible for us not to act according to this movement but according to charity, which will be voluntary and so much the more meritorious in proportion as we shall have a greater amount of repugnance to overcome. It is, then, wrong for souls to torment themselves in believing that they do not possess charity because they do not feel any sensible affection for certain persons, but rather feel inclined to flee from them and to take in bad part all that they do and say, without being able to sympathize with them in anything. If, however, with the sole motive of pleasing God, they act in regard to these persons as if their antipathy did not exist, they may feel assured that charity reigns in their heart and directs their actions. Others, on the contrary, fear that they entertain particular friendships, which are so fatal in Religion, because there is between themselves and such and such a Sister a sympathy in disposition and in their manner of seeing things. If their conduct in regard to these persons does not show the attraction they feel towards them, while affairs remain thus, they may consider that in all things they act through charity. But when giving way to a natural impulse which we feel for or against anyone, we show it exteriorly by some sign, then we become culpable. Charity no longer directs our actions; it has been wounded.

Let us remark, in passing, that these manifest aversions and particular friendships, which cause such terrible disorders in Religion, have their source only in a want of vigilance and of energy to combat those first movements of which we have just spoken. Although by the grace of God we do not here have to combat these frightful dragons, let us not watch with less care over our first impressions, that these cruel enemies may not spring up and increase among us. Yes, let us watch and pray, that we may be always charitable and alike to all, what ever involuntary im-

pressions our heart might experience in our relations with others. Let us particularly avoid allowing any of these impressions to appear before anyone whomsoever, except to those who have the direction of our soul. Let us confide to them alone our subjects of pain or of temptation; for our Divine Master will always give them special grace to console us, to enlighten us, to aid us, and to correct us, if necessary.

But, alas! is this what we do? Under the specious pretext of not wishing to trouble, to worry our Superiors, to make them lose their time, or to speak evil of our neighbor, etc., do we not give our confidence in preference to those of our Sisters whose character sympathizes with our own, hiding from ourselves the mutual danger of such imprudence? Thus, through a false delicacy, we pour into the heart and mind of another what we fear to confide to a Father or a Mother!

From this arise a thousand miseries. Aversions are communicated, and they discuss together about this one or that one, (very uselessly, however, since they have neither the grace nor the authority to remedy matters). These confidences, instead of lessening, on the contrary, aggravate the evil; these gnats become elephants; nothing is heard but mutual complaints by which charity is wounded; and when at last Superiors wish to stop the evil, the leaven is found so well mixed with the paste that they can no longer be separated Let us go back to the source of all this disorder; we shall find that at such a time, in such a circumstance, a little animosity or discontent has been hidden from our Superiors, but manifested to some one of our Sisters. She understanding and sharing in our sentiments, communicates it in her turn; from one to another the venom is insinuated into all hearts, and, as a decayed apple spoils all others near it, it has spread and put charity to flight . . . Ah! let us then watch; let us pray; let us combat without relaxation that charity may always reign in our Community and never become weakened through our fault.

The serious considerations which we have just

made must, I hope, have convinced us of the necessity of loving God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, above all things, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. These commandments, as we have said, are just, since all that God commands is sovereignly just. They are the very expression of His Will, and all other precepts relate to these two in a manner more or less direct. To observe them exactly is to clothe ourselves with justice; and this is why this breastplate repels all the darts of our enemies; it is to be in the fortress of good thoughts, clothed with all the virtues which love engenders and fortifies; it is to empty our heart to fill it with God; now, where God is, the enemy cannot enter.

SECOND POINT

Let us examine in the presence of God, how the practice of true charity strengthens us in the spirit of our holy vocation. To love God with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our strength, cannot be done without continual penance and mortification, which withdraw from their natural inclinations all our faculties, inclined as they are to evil, and make us go, by force of rowing, against this fatal current.

This obligation which we have of clothing ourselves with the breastplate of justice places us under the happy necessity of subduing the flesh by penance, of subjecting the senses by mortification, and of strengthening the soul by interior renunciation and self-abnegation. We fear not to repeat here what has been said elsewhere, because it cannot be too often repeated: love and mortification are inseparable; they naturally sustain and strengthen each other, increasing day by day until their entire perfection or consummation takes place in Heaven, where love alone remains. Here below, it cannot burn without consuming, were it only straw or dust, (and there is always material to be furnished!) It is a fire which devours all Thus, the increase of charity leads necessarily to a corresponding growth of the spirit of penance.

And can the soul which God clothes with justice, and which remembers the time when she was not so clothed, can she live without wishing to repair the past? When she feels within herself, as did St. Paul, the sting of the flesh, which places her in danger of committing evil, does she not feel the need of reducing this flesh to subjection? When she sees the facility with which the human heart attaches itself to creatures at the expense of the love of the Creator, will she not do all in her power to separate herself from them, to avoid and to forget them? This is what penance does.

As to the spirit of prayer: who can doubt that it gains greatly by the practice of love? Can we love God without seeking to know His will, without meditating upon His laws and counsels, so as to put them into practice? Can we love Him without thinking of Him, without finding out means of pleasing Him, without desiring and begging of Him the aid we need to be faithful to Him? Can we love Him without seeking Him in all things and everywhere? without laboring to draw nearer to Him by avoiding all that can be an obstacle to the contemplation of this Divine Object? Lastly, can we love God without wishing to be united to Him? for love tends to union! . . . But, while awaiting the consummation of all love and of all union in Heaven, let us labor here below at perfecting ourselves each day in true charity. To possess this virtue is to possess God, since He is Charity; it is to be united to Him.

Does not charity towards our neighbor also involve the practice of mortification in a number of circumstances where it is necessary to renounce one's self, to suffer, to inconvenience one's self to render a service, to support the miseries and weaknesses of others, to bear with the differences of disposition and character, in fine, always and generously to relinquish one's self?

Zeal is also one of the fruits of charity. Is not that ardent zeal for the glory of God and the good of souls, that burning desire to make ourselves voluntary victims, immolated like our Lord and in union with Him,

conformable to the spirit of our vocation? . . . No, we cannot love God and souls without seeking the glory of the former and the good of the latter. We cannot love God without being consumed with zeal, without taking means proper to render our zeal efficacious, without uniting ourselves intimately to Jesus a Victim, and immolating ourselves with Him for so noble a cause.

THIRD POINT

Examples

Our Divine Master presents us in His Own Person so perfect a model of charity that we know not where to find one comparable to it. It was His charity for us which made Him clothe Himself with our mortal flesh, subject Himself to our miseries, and practise obedience, poverty, humility, etc. It was charity which directed and animated all His thoughts, words and actions. It was charity which inspired Him with so heroic a devotedness. Let us then form ourselves to the practice of charity according to this Model by excellence; we cannot contemplate It too often, particularly when we are inclined to seek rather our own interest than that of God and of souls. Let us remember that Jesus Christ sought only one thing: the accomplishment of His Father's designs. It was His nourishment, as He tells us, because charity takes pleasure in doing the will of its beloved.

Does not the charity of the most holy Virgin serve also as a model and an incentive to us in the practice of this virtue? Her love for God led her in her tenderest years to renounce the world and its goods to consecrate herself to the service of God. It was her love for souls that sustained and fortified her on Calvary, at that sorrowful moment when her Divine Son rendered His last sigh upon the cross, a Victim for the salvation of men and the glory of His Father. Could she have carried further her heroic charity than to accept for her children those who were the cause of the death of this Son so worthy of her love?

We are told that St. Theodore, of Cappadocia made himself as an eye to the blind, a foot to the lame, as

clothing to the poor, as asylum to pilgrims, a physician to the sick, a servant and dispenser to the necessitous. His admirable charity extended thus to all kind of suffering and was exercised towards all without any exception of persons; but he took more care of and showed more tenderness for sinners and for the unfortunate, because the first had more need of it, and the second more faithfully represented to Him our Divine Lord.

St. Macarius, when visiting a solitary, asked him what he could take with relish; the latter replied that he would be very glad to have some fresh white bread. To satisfy his desire, the Saint, then aged ninety years, went himself to Alexandria to exchange for a piece of fresh white bread a portion of that from his Monastery, where they baked only once a year. The sick solitary, through a spirit of mortification, did not wish to touch this bread which had cost his brother so much; but he ate of it, the others pressing him to do so, in order to please the holy old man.

Our holy Mother St. Teresa never passed a day without performing some act of charity, and when, in the evening, she perceived that she had not done so, she hastened, at the time when each one retired to her cell, to give light to her Sisters, not wishing to deprive herself of the merit attached to all actions of this kind. Her seraphic soul was always exercising its love for the greater glory of God and the good of souls. We have proof of this in all that she did, thought, said and endured to establish the Reform. She sought only the glory of God in all things. Are we the true children of such a Mother? . . .

St. Ambrose was so touched with compassion for sinners that, when he heard their confessions, he could not prevent himself from shedding so great an abundance of tears that his example excited his penitents to contrition for their faults.

A Solitary once said to a holy old man, that the sight of one of his guilty brethren so strongly agitated his heart that he could not resolve to open the door of his cell to him, but that he opened it most willingly to others who were virtuous. The Saint replied:

"My son, if you are good to those who are good, be doubly good to those who are not so; because being weak and sick they need your assistance."

It is related of St. Francis that being at the Church of Our Lady of the Angels, he saw a great multitude of demons trying, but in vain, to enter the Monastery. A quarrel having arisen among the brothers, one among them conceived feelings of hatred against a companion, and the enemy immediately introduced himself into the Convent through this breach; but he did not enjoy his triumph long, because the Saint very soon reconciled the two Religious.

The preceding example confirms the opinion of St. Bernard, who assures us that the demon does not much fear the Religious who are chaste and austere, because he has often succeeded in drawing such into his nets, and even in making them lose themselves; but those whom he dreads, those who torment him and make him wither up with spite, are those who live in harmony with each other and whom the bond of charity unites to God and to their brethren.

The charity which reigned in the Carmelite Monastery of Alba, in Spain, was admirable. The devotedness of the Religious for one another, the care which they took of the sick, their generosity in mutually pardoning their little weaknesses, made of this Community a habitation of peace and sanctity where our Lord found His delight. Thus, it was not rare to see their acts of charity followed by some miracle. One of the Sisters was attacked by a strange disease which caused fetid perspiration to emit from her body, and an insupportable odor which it was dangerous to breathe; nevertheless, two of her companions offering to assist and to serve her, our Lord appeared to them to testify that the care they gave to His servant was most agreeable to Him.

Another Religious of this Monastery, unfortunately ran against one of the Sisters whom she did not perceive, and put out her eye. She was inconsolable and almost driven to despair. When the poor patient heard of the affliction of her who, without intending it, had thus injured her, she asked to be allowed to speak to

her, and begged her to think no more of what had happened, protesting that her sadness caused her more pain than the injury which she had received.

One day when our holy Mother St. Teresa was passing by this Convent, in great haste, Sister Catherine of the Angels came to beg her to assist and console her. But our Saint, whom pressing affairs were calling far from this Monastery, refused to listen to the account of the interior pains of the poor afflicted Sister, who then went to complain to our Lord. This good Master, wishing to take into His Own hands the interests of His servant, permitted that the coach of the travellers should break down on the way, and this obliged our holy Mother to return on foot to the Convent of Alba. She did not deceive herself concerning the true cause of this accident, for upon arriving at the door she hastened to say to a Sister: "Call Sister Catherine of the Angels to me, because it is she who has made me return here."

Another time, our Lord appearing to Catherine of St. John the Evangelist, invited her to ask of Him whatever grace she desired. "Lord," said this faithful lover, "give me a heart full of charity!" This favor was granted to her in a wonderful manner, and was even manifested exteriorly; for often, when she was in prayer, there would come from all her body, sparks as of fire. Her charity for her Sisters was also rewarded by miracles. Having one day asked a sick Sister what she was able to take, and the latter showing a desire for certain herbs which could be found nowhere, because of the lateness of the season, the holy Carmelite ran, nevertheless, to the garden where, under the leaves of a plant, she found some. Each evening she would gather fresh ones there.

FOURTH POINT

Examen

The considerations which we have made upon charity and the examples which have been placed before our eyes, should now bear their fruit by a serious examination of ourselves.

Do I love God truly, that is to say, with all my heart . . . with all my mind . . . with all my strength . . . and above all things? Let me see if all the affections of my heart belong to Him; if I love only what He loves, as He loves it, because He loves it and as much as He loves it . . . ; let me see if my will is always united to His . . . ; if I receive as coming from His hand the humiliations, the contradictions and the pains, sown in my pathway . . .

Does not my heart feel sensibly the praise, the applause and the affection of creatures? Do I not seek them? . . . In order to satisfy my vanity, do I not try to guess the amount of interest, of esteem and of confidence which my Superiors have for me? Is there not in my heart some little attachment, either to offices and employments or to the objects which I use, and which is hurtful to my interior recollection? . . . In a word, is not my poor heart contracted and agitated by fears and desires which prove that God does not reign there alone, and that some usurpers dispute with Him the throne? My impatience, my complaints, murmurs and agitation will prove that my will is not united to that of God in all those events which excite these kind of movements in my heart.

Do I love God with all my mind? . . . What useless and vain thoughts! What calculations, what arrangements, which tend only to procure some satisfaction of the senses, of the mind and the heart, or towards finding means of avoiding some contradiction or humiliation! . . . If my mind ~~was~~ united to God, through love, my memory and understanding, instead of being engaged upon such trifling matters, would be employed in testifying my love to God by acts of virtue; and to do this they would "meditate day and night on the law of the Lord" and seek for means of putting it into practice.

If I love God with my whole soul, its faculties would be seriously occupied in endeavoring to know God and His Will, to know itself, and to seek the means of combating its humors, destroying its de-

fects, and resisting its inclinations; it would labor to find out the snares of its enemies, their plans, their number, their strength, and to arm itself in such a manner as to be able to put them to flight. Is this what I do?

To love God with all my strength, it is necessary that my whole being should be employed in His service, that is to say, according to His holy Will and for His love, whatever might be the nature of my actions: "Whether you eat or drink, or whether you walk, etc. . . ." do all for the glory of God, as St. Paul tells us. These words of the Apostle teach us that it is not in the nature of our actions but in their motive that love consists. Thus, our most simple actions, those which are most natural, can become acts of love if we do them with the intention of pleasing God, and not because of the pleasure, however legitimate, which we find in them. To love God with all our strength is, then, to supernaturalize all things, refer all to God, do all to please Him alone. Therefore, if questioned when I eat, when I write, when I work, when I rest or when I unbend my mind, I must be able to reply that I act only with a view to God without paying any attention to the natural attraction which leads me to perform these actions. To love God with all one's strength means to consult in nothing one's tastes, senses, self-love, inclinations, etc., in order to see and accomplish only one thing: the Will or the good pleasure of God. What matters the revolts of the "ego"? Mortification will allay these revolts by cutting off even the sprouts of our bad nature.

To love God above all things is to repress every instinctive movement towards creatures; to cut unceasingly the thousand ties that bind us to the earth; it is to retrench, to renounce all those trifles which occupy the heart at the expense of the liberty and purity of its love. But it is easy to delude ourselves on this point . . . and am I not myself thus deluded? We believe that we love God above all things; and without having a doubt on the subject, we remain attached to these nothings, . . . We imagine that no

one in the world is more detached than we; to see the contrary it suffices for obedience to make some change in our little customs, or to upset ever so little our arrangements.

Let us suppose, for example, that the Superiors find it proper to dispose, without the knowledge of a Religious, of an object in her use, which was pleasing or useful to her, such as a little ornament in a hermitage, an Office book, some instrument of work, an article in her cell, etc. She will at first be surprised, and then disturbed. To these first feelings, which are not culpable, she adds others more imperfect: she seeks to guess with what intentions, or for the profit of what person, the Prioress took this object from her. These thoughts will cause loss of time, murmuring, complaints, even interior discontent, suspicions more or less ill-grounded, perhaps even jealousy then she will have feelings of rancor, she will show restraint in her intercourse with the Sister whom she believes has been preferred to herself. She will even show herself cold and reserved to the Prioress, whom she will interiorly accuse of partiality . . . Can we say then that we love God above all things, when we allow ourselves to be thus overcome by the privation of a nothing?

It is on these or similar occasions that we show our attachment to creatures: our agitation and trouble are a proof as well as a measure of it. When we truly love God above all things, it suffices to see His Will in the privation imposed, for us to remain in peace without seeking the instrument, the cause and the consequence of these privations. God wills it: I ought, then, to think that it is well done; what matters the rest? . . .

From this first precept of charity let us pass on to the second. Do I love my neighbor as myself? Ah! if this were so, my interior dispositions and my exterior conduct would be perfect. Let us examine what our thoughts are with regard to others. Do we show indulgence for these weaknesses? Do we habitually see all things with a charitable eye? Do we take all things in good part; do we show a promptitude in remarking the virtues of others, their good qualities, in covering their defects, or at least excusing their intentions? In a word, do we think of

them as we would have them think of us? . . . If I do not wish my intentions to be judged, to be blamed simply on account of appearances; if I am very glad when others show compassion for my weaknesses, my troubles and my struggles; if I desire to have the good-will, the esteem and the affection of others, should I not give, in my turn, what I ask of them? . . . Is not this most just? . . . Behold the measure which our Lord gives me to know the length and the breadth of my charity in thought!

Am I charitable in word? Do I speak of others as I should wish to hear myself spoken of? Do I speak to my companions as I desire them to speak to me? If my charity had been regulated thus, how mild and easy my intercourse with them would have been . . . But, alas! I cannot render myself such a testimony . . . Does not my conscience, on the contrary, reproach me with having interpreted maliciously and falsely the intentions of my Sisters; with having contradicted the words of this one, criticized the conduct of that one, with having made known the imperfections of others, laughed at their weaknesses, and communicated to others certain subjects of personal discontent? . . . How many reproaches! how many bitter or cutting words! how many impertinent words! how many others full of impatience and ill-humor!

What has been my conduct in regard to the absent? Have I not spoken ill of them, forgetting that if I had been in their place and had to listen to this uncharitable conversation, I would have been greatly pained, and my virtue put to a great trial? . . . Why these suppositions more or less ill-founded in regard to the conduct of the absent? Why these observations about their incapacity, their little oddities or other peculiarities? Things which it is so painful to hear said of one's self and which wound self-love so much! If I had been in their place how unhappy I should have felt to hear such remarks! With what warmth would I not have defended myself from the accusations directed against me, for fear of losing the esteem of my Sisters or of seeing it lessened! How glad I should have been if some one had taken my part! . . . Well then, have I felt it a duty to perform this act of charity in favor of my accused and absent Sister? Have I sought to calm the little resentments of

which they were the object and to give others a better and more favorable opinion of them?

But, on the contrary, what lightness and imprudence have I not shown on such occasions! An inconsiderate word, without any importance in itself, has sufficed, perhaps, either to kindle or to increase the fire of discord which the demon afterwards took care to keep up for his own profit. The influence of such reports, even when true, is very fatal in a Community. It is an injury, the wound of which is not very sensibly felt at first, but the poison of which insinuates itself and afterwards makes terrible ravages . . . I should then be inconsolable for having contributed to these misfortunes by the imprudence of my conduct.

If my conscience here agrees with my memory in not reproaching me with anything on this subject which could cause me trouble or fear, I should not on this account believe myself exempt from all responsibility; for, in consequence of a natural lightness, a want of reflection or of experience, or from habitual negligence in my examen, I have perhaps added to my other faults that of ignorance in regard to the evil I have done. I will then be acting wisely if, at this moment, I beg pardon of God for my faults against charity and take strong resolutions to avoid them for the future. Let us together implore our Divine Master to be willing to efface them, to repair their consequences, and to grant us the grace of watching so carefully over our words that we may never again wound this beautiful virtue in any manner whatsoever.

It now remains for me to examine, in the last place, how I have observed in my actions this great precept of charity towards my neighbor. Has my conduct towards others been such as I would have others act towards me? Alas! what reproaches should I not address to myself upon this subject! How many times have I not forgotten this rule! At least, am I now disposed to conform my conduct and actions to it? If this is so, henceforth each one will have nothing but praises for my gracious, gentle and amiable manners. They will find me always disposed to render services to my Sisters, to relieve them in their labors, to console them in their pains, and to share their afflictions, etc. I shall then soften the abruptness

of my manners; I shall avoid wounding the self-love of others; I shall close my eyes to certain little weaknesses, certain little errors which escape because of human frailty, in order to avoid the temptation of seeing them and of revealing them, either in public or in private; for I should be very happy to have others act in this manner towards me. In fine, respecting and honoring my neighbor, I shall have for her all the consideration due to her age, her titles and her profession. I shall do good to all, as far as it is in my power; I shall take care not to annoy others by my exactions; and I shall freely pardon any little pain they may cause me. Amen!

CHAPTER TWELFTH—(Continued.)

THIRD MEDITATION.

FIRST POINT.

Text: *In all things take the shield of faith, where-with you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one; for without faith it is impossible to please God."*

Our holy Rule continues to address us in formal and imperative terms, to oblige us, so to speak, to accept the complete armor with which it desired to clothe us when enrolling us in the Army of the Lord. After having shown us that, while on earth, we must necessarily expect continual combat, it has shown us our enemies, measured their strength, and disclosed their snares; then, to encourage and animate us to sustain the interests of our Sovereign, it has taught us that He will furnish us with the arms necessary for our defense, if we apply ourselves with care to please Him by practising virtue. Finally, this same Rule, which has been inspired by God, points out to us the arms with which we should be provided. It formally enjoins upon us: first, to gird our loins with the *girdle of chastity* which weakens the flesh and puts the demon to flight; secondly, it wishes us to gain strength, telling us to nourish our soul with *holy thoughts*, which fortify it and render it all powerful against God's enemies and our own; thirdly, it also enjoins us to put on the *breastplate of justice* in order that perfect charity may preserve us from the darts of egotism and self-love.

But this is not all. A shield also is necessary to ward off the arrows which our enemies direct against us. This shield is that of faith, which we are not permitted to take or to leave aside at will, for our holy Rule does not say: "you may make use of it", but it says formally: *Take the shield of faith . . .*" Moreover, this shield is judged to be necessary, even indispensable, by these words: *in all things*, by which we must understand that it does not suffice to keep this armor within our reach and at our disposal, to be used only in some important circumstances; but that we should bear it always on our arm, to make use of it in all places, because everywhere we meet with some enemy of God who indirectly attacks

Him in our person, and also because everywhere we are exposed to receive serious wounds.

The arrows which they direct against us are *fiery darts*; now, we must know well how serious and painful are wounds caused by fire! We must then, *in all things take the shield of faith*, against which are repelled the fiery darts capable of causing our death, or at least of disfiguring us. Let us remember that we can glorify our good Master only by preserving our soul intact, without injury, without wound or scar which could deform or disfigure it. And the better to understand the necessity of this shield, which is impenetrable even to fiery darts, our holy Rule adds: *For without faith it is impossible to please God*. It thus makes us understand that we are not agreeable to our Chief, and that we even expose ourselves to lose His friendship each time we are found without this defensive armor.

The necessity of bearing everywhere such a shield being well understood, it is important now to examine it with care in order to study its form, its dimensions and its use, and to know upon what occasions we should employ it; in a word, we should become instructed at the school of the Holy Spirit in everything that concerns this spiritual weapon.

1st.—Our shield is round, which form is regarded as the most perfect: thus the life of faith, which the Religious soul lives, comes from God and goes to God. 2nd.—It should be high and wide enough to cover and to preserve the nobler parts of man: thus a life of faith shields our soul from the deadly arrows of the demon. 3rd.—It ought to be made of iron, steel, or brass: which shows us what resistance faith opposes to the darts of our enemies. 4th.—It should be worn on the arm: that is to say, we should add good works to our faith. 5th.—The warrior should never set aside his shield while he remains in camp and exposed to the combat: so the soldier of Christ, finding danger everywhere, (all places being for him battlefields,) ought also, everywhere and always, to arm himself with faith. Each time that he is threatened, he should hold up this shield before the arrows directed against him. 6th.—In times of peace the warrior lays aside his defensive armor which he no longer needs: with us, whose life upon earth is but a perpetual combat and

who can enjoy true peace only in Heaven, the shield will fall from our arm upon quitting the battlefield; for faith enters not into that place of eternal repose, that peace of God, which constitutes the felicity of the Saints.

With the aid of God we shall now try to develop these thoughts somewhat, following a certain order, as far as this will be possible, so that we may the better understand what faith is, its necessity for salvation, and the use we should make of it in our different temptations.

Faith is the first of the theological virtues; it is a divine gift by which we believe in God and in all that He has revealed to His Church. Setting aside the theological definition of this virtue, as also its role in the principal mysteries of our holy Religion, we shall limit ourselves here to considering it as a practical virtue, necessary to acquire religious perfection, and particularly that of Carmel, which is the end intended by our holy Rule when it gives us faith as a shield.

1st.—Let us now speak of the rounded form of this spiritual armor. Faith, we are told, is a supernatural gift by which we believe in God and in His works and by which we attain unto Him by the actions which we accomplish in Him, with Him and for Him. It embraces within its sphere Him “Who is”, and Who has created all things for His own glory: it seeks Him in His essence and in His divine operations; it observes Him in His visible and invisible works; it shows Him everywhere to the faithful soul; and finally guides this soul to eternal life, which is God. The life of faith moves, so to speak, in a circle, having God as its beginning and its end. In this immense circle are enclosed all the mysteries of our holy Religion; yes, all: and their number is incalculable.

We are and we live in an ocean of mysteries, an ocean as infinite as God Himself. Each drop of this vast ocean is a mystery. God present and acting in all things and always: such is the mystery which faith discovers to our understanding and presents to our senses, according to their capacity, in order to conduct us to this same God; in such a way that, stripping all things of their accidents, we see God in all, with His action and Will hidden in all events, persons and things, such as the stars, all creatures animate and inanimate. The smallest little insect encloses

a mystery, and this mystery becomes the object of our practical faith as soon as it is known and understood; that is to say, in the creature we see God, we adore Him, and try to conform our sentiments to what faith teaches us upon this subject. Thus, the greater knowledge we have of these mysteries, the more does faith act upon them, and the more also do we approach perfection, which is God.

2nd.—If we consider now the dimensions of our shield we shall easily understand that it ought to be in proportion to the size of the one who is to carry it. If I see a very large shield I must suppose that it is for a soldier of tall stature. If I see a very small one I say: “this belongs to a very small soldier”. In the same way, a small degree of faith does not show a great perfection; consequently if I aspire to a very high degree of sanctity it is necessary that my faith should increase, that it should become as immense as God Himself, as high as Heaven, as vast as eternity, capable, in a word, of protecting entirely this soul created to the image of God and destined to be His dwelling place. Wherever the faculties of my soul can penetrate, in everything that my understanding can conceive, my faith should be there to enlighten, to instruct and guide them, and to sanctify all their operations by uniting them to those of God. Whether I mount to the highest heavens, or descend to the depths of the abyss, or go through the whole earth, to whatever occupation, exterior or interior, I give myself up, my faith ought to be great enough to shield my soul from the fiery darts of the most wicked one, and aid me to practise virtue.

3rd.—If this shield must be of steel or brass, it is to show that faith ought to render the soul strong and invulnerable, in such a way that no temptation might be able to injure it. Faith is the source of the most heroic actions; it has made martyrs; it is faith which works prodigies, which compels nature to derogate from its laws by the power of God communicated to him who lives by faith. “If you had faith even as a grain of mustard seed, you could move mountains,” said our Blessed Lord. Faith puts the demons to flight by divinizing the souls whom they come to attack. With it a child may triumph over a giant. To what then must we attribute our weakness in combats? Alas! to our little faith. Let us have

a firm, unshaken faith and we shall feel the strength of God within us.

4th.—We have also said that the shield should be on the arm of the warrior, that it might protect him as long as the combat lasts and that he might be able to present it towards that direction in which the arrow is aimed against him. Yes, our faith ought to be active; it ought to lead us continually to the practice of virtue; its light ought to enlighten and guide us in every action. I ought to strive to realize in my works all that practical perfection which it has discovered to me. To know and not to act is to show one's self an idle, useless, and guilty soldier. Does not our Lord recommend us "to work while there is yet light"?

5th.—Yes, our faith ought to be accompanied by works; this virtue is indispensable to us here below, since our life is but one continuation of temptations and of combats which, consequently, oblige us to a perpetual use of this shield. Penetrating by faith into the depths of eternity, to consider at one time the frightful abyss of hell and at another to contemplate the magnificence of the heavenly City, our soul, by turns terrified and inflamed with ardor at the sight of these mysteries, feels pressed to avoid by all possible means that which will conduct it to an unhappy eternity, and to do all that will lead it to supreme happiness. Assisting by faith at the councils of the Three Divine Persons, initiated into the secrets which They propose to carry out in favor of creatures, ravished at these admirable inventions of love and mercy, at the wisdom which shines and the goodness which is resplendent in all Their decisions, our soul in its admiration cannot but force itself to render to God love for love, and to unite its actions to His by obeying His laws.

When faith transports us to Bethlehem, to Nazareth, and to the villages and towns where our Lord has given us such great examples of virtue; when by faith we assist at that touching scene of the Supper which preceded His death, when we follow Him to the Garden of Olives, to the tribunals where He is outraged and despised, when we go along the road which leads to Calvary, to His Cross, and to His Tomb, what energy does not our soul draw from the contemplation of all these things? Could it then remain insensible, inert, in the presence of these acts

of inconceivable love, could it fail to gain strength and vigor for the practice of those virtues of which the God-Man offers us so perfect an example? . . .

Penetrating by faith even to the Heart of our Divine Master, feeling its pulsations of love for the Will of His Father and zeal for His glory and the good of souls, can our poor heart remain unmoved? Will it not unite itself to this Adorable Heart which is given to it as a refuge and a model? And when faith will have made us hear the call of the Heart of Jesus, when it will have made us understand His desire to consummate our felicity by that union of our heart with His, with what ardor will we not tend to this union, by generously applying ourselves to the practice of the most sublime virtues! . . .

If faith opens to us the door of the holy Tabernacle to make us meditate upon this mystery of love in all its details, and we hear that silent Voice which begs for men the love and mercy of His Heavenly Father, and which speaks to them of charity, of annihilation, of unbounded devotedness, can our soul remain asleep, will it not rouse all its faculties to listen to the lessons of the Divine Captive, in order to labor efficaciously to humble itself, to annihilate itself, to pray and to love Him in solitude and silence?

If in our Superiors faith shows us God, according to these words of Jesus Christ: "He who heareth you heareth Me, and he who despiseth you despiseth Me", will not the practice of an absolute submission and an entire abandonment spring from these lessons of faith? . . . Lastly, if in all events, persons and things, faith shows me always present that God Who fills all with His immensity, is it not evident that my actions will always be virtuous, full of kindness, of patience, of forbearance, of submission to the Divine Will, of recollection, and of the love of God and my neighbor? . . . It is thus that the just man lives by faith; faith causes him to live in God; therefore he is strong even with the strength of God Himself . . . With this nourishment, in this strength, he walks with assurance along the thorny path of life, he combats with success the enemies which he meets at each step, and repulses their incessant attacks. It is thus that his soul acts in all things for the glory of God, for it is armed with the shield of faith which it opposes as an im-

penetrable rampart to the darts of the enemy and with which it covers all parts that are threatened. We shall now go and place ourselves upon the battlefield, to see how this salutary exercise is carried on.

6th.—Let us contemplate the valiant soldier standing on guard, as ready to defend as to attack. The flesh casts a fiery dart to excite and light up his passions and lead him to forbidden pleasures; the attentive ear of the warrior has heard the whizzing sound, and before the dart wounds his heart his shield has been directed to his side; faith recalls to him the flames of hell, the joys of Paradise, the sufferings of a God, the glory of virginity, etc.; and this remembrance, which preserves the soul from sin, also aids it to mortify the flesh, to watch over the senses, and to pray in order to obtain the aid of Heaven. Hell aims at him an arrow of pride, of vain-glory: the blow is foreseen; the shield wards it off, faith recalls to the soul in danger that memorable combat of the magic spirits in which St. Michael overthrew Lucifer by his single word: "Who is like unto God!" How many arrows are thus darted against us by our enemies from all directions, in all places and at all times. Faith can always defend us if we know how to make use of it as a shield *to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one*"

Are we tempted to impatience, to murmuring or resentment? Faith recalls to us examples of the patience, the meekness, the mildness of our Lord, Who has willed to be called a Lamb and Who has promised a great reward to those who are meek and humble of heart. These considerations, made to the purpose, put an end to the temptation and destroy its effects. Are we tempted to idleness, negligence or tepidity? Faith reminds us that, according to the energetic expression of the Sacred Books, God "vomits" the tepid soul out of His mouth, that He promises Heaven to the vigilant who know how to struggle and to do violence to themselves. These lights of faith assist the soul and aid it to overcome its sloth. Are we tempted to discouragement, to despair? Faith presents to our meditation those mysteries of mercy which are so well calculated to reanimate our confidence: the Incarnation of a God, His death upon the Cross, Jesus made the Victim of propitiation for sin, Jesus the strength

of the weak, the medicine of the sick, etc.; again, faith shows us Mary under titles so consoling as those of Refuge of Sinners, Mother of Mercy, Assured Protectress of all who invoke her; then again, faith recalls many consoling passages of the Holy Scripture, which have been dictated by the Holy Spirit Himself and which, while disclosing to us the sentiments of the Heart of God in regard to His poor creatures, teach us that he who confides in the Lord acquires by this a title which assures him of the aid of grace here below and a crown of glory hereafter. The arrows of the enemy are then extinguished against these lights of faith. Are we tempted to dissipation, to curiosity, disgust for solitude and silence? Faith shows us Jesus a solitary, for love of us, in the bosom of the most holy Virgin, at Nazareth, in the desert, in the tomb, in the Tabernacle, continually occupied with the glory of His Father and our salvation; again, faith causes us to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit inviting us to repair with Him into the desert, with the promise of speaking to our heart if we faithfully follow Him there and are silent in order to hear what He says: this will suffice to drive away the temptation.

Are we tempted to blame the actions of our neighbor, to judge him rashly, and perhaps secretly despise him? Faith opposes to this temptation the immense charity of Jesus Christ for all men, the precept which He has given us and which He calls His commandment: to love one another as He has loved us . . . Are we tempted to disobey? Do we wish to have our own judgment prevail in all things? Do we find our will unruly? Faith opposes to this temptation the obedience of Jesus to Mary, the promises of God to him who renounces his own will, the cries of victory and the glorious crown of the truly obedient, and this will put the tempter to flight. Are we tempted to seek our ease, to procure for ourselves many little conveniences? Faith sets before our eyes the example of the poverty, the destitution, the mortification of our Lord; and the graces which He sheds in abundance upon those who follow Him in these same states: the pleasure which He takes in seeing us unite ourselves to Him by the practice of these great virtues; the flames of Purgatory from which we are

spared, the glory given to God, the good done to souls by a life of renunciation and of mortification, etc., etc., and again the darts of the enemy are broken to pieces against this shield.

Perhaps some event, apparently unfavorable, disconcerts us, an unexpected humiliation affrights us, a contradiction comes to upset our projects. We are tempted to regard all of these things with the eyes of the flesh, we are in great danger of complaining of God or of His creatures. But if faith recalls to our remembrance that merciful and divine Providence which directs and conducts all things with wisdom, for His glory and our own advantage, this light shows us God hidden in this event, in this humiliation, and in this contradiction, to give us an occasion of performing acts of abandonment, of humility, of patience, of submission, etc. Again, it shows us His Eye fixed upon us to see in what manner we enter into His designs; His all-powerful Arm ready to aid us, His Heart always opened to us as a refuge and a proof of His love. What can be more capable of raising us to God, and thus placing us beyond the reach of the arrows directed against us by the enemy?

Are prayer, examen, and exercises of piety become a burden to us? Are we tempted to abandon them, or at least to abridge them? Faith recalls to us the promises of God to those who do violence to themselves and who persevere unto the end; it shows us that being sinners and nevertheless inclined to vain-glory, God, by withdrawing His consolations, causes us to remember what we have merited by our offenses and that He is punishing us here in order to spare us hereafter; that this God so good and so just is keeping us in our place by humbling us in this state of dryness, disgust and aridity, that He is proving our fidelity to recompense it later, either here below or in eternity.

Does the yoke of the Lord seem hard and the Rule burdensome? Are we tempted to neglect the practice of regular observance, at least in little things, such as a word, a look, a sign, a little delay at the call of obedience or the sound of the bell, etc. . . .? Faith

opposes to this temptation the fidelity of our Divine Savior Who accomplished the law even to an iota, because He saw in it only the Will of His heavenly Father; it recalls the promises made to the servant who is "faithful in little things," the grace hidden in these little things and destined to adorn the soul who observes them through love; it shows us the Heart of the Divine Master well pleased with the numberless acts of renunciation which these little practices of regularity and of virtue require. For example, when, in sickness, the remedies prescribed are not given, or are badly administered, when attentions are wanting, when the food displeases us, when the bed appears hard, the temperature too cold or too hot, the Infirmarian wanting in care, etc.: all these are so many subjects of temptation and of murmuring. But faith shows us in all these things the order or the permission of God, His designs of mercy, His glory, His good pleasure, the expiation of our past sensuality, an occasion for acquiring merit, of practising virtue, of giving to God some proof of our love; and at once the temptation will disappear, or at least it will become more advantageous than hurtful because from it will result more humility, greater abandonment into the hands of God, more patience and generosity in suffering. And so this arrow which seems to us capable of destroying the religious spirit, continues to strengthen and increase it by the aid of the shield of faith.

From all the above we must conclude that it is with reason that our holy Rule warns us that **"without faith it is impossible to please God"** and to glorify Him. In truth, the exercise of this virtue makes us see God, His action and designs, in all things and everywhere; and it leads us to act always in conformity with this truth, that is to say, to practise virtue. Thus it is that we overcome our enemies, that we ward off their arrows, that we perfect and strengthen ourselves day by day in accomplishing the good pleasure of God, by entering into His views and uniting our action to His in spite of all the movements of nature, which are overcome by a strong and active

faith. Ah! let us beg unceasingly for an increase of faith, because there infallibly comes with it an increase of charity, and consequently a real progress in perfection, to the greater glory of God. Yes, faith glorifies God, because it assigns to all things their proper place: God upon His throne and in His own dominion; we in our nothingness and at His disposal.

Ah! if we could but understand how agreeable to God this life of faith renders a soul, with how many graces and merits it enriches it, what great actions it can perform for the glory of God and the good of souls, in fine, what glory is reserved for it in Heaven, there is no one who would not be willing to destroy in himself all the life of nature to live only by that of faith; not one who would not be willing to repress all that preserves the life of nature, in order to nourish himself with that which can maintain the life of pure faith. Let us then cast nature aside with all that is human about it; let us divest created things of their false appearances; let us close our eyes and our ears to all that is material, to see and to hear the truth hidden under so many different coverings hard to remove, but which faith and love can penetrate. Let us labor without relaxation to augment our faith by prayer, vigilance, mortification, silence and recollection. Let us journey onward, notwithstanding the winds and the waves, according to the light and teaching of faith. There is no circumstance in which this virtue cannot enlighten us, strengthen us, and render us victorious. Everywhere it smooths the difficulties of our way; it is the light which guides our steps and prevents us from taking wrong and deceitful paths; it ever withdraws us from what is false to lead us to the truth; in every encounter it strengthens us for the combat and assures us of the victory: never is its aid refused us. In a word, it is the resource of all those in affliction, of all in misfortune; it furnishes them with the means of overcoming difficulties and of avoiding the pitfalls with which life here below is filled.

SECOND POINT

We can no longer doubt of the efficacy of this point

of the Rule, when well practised, for establishing in us the true spirit of our Holy Order.

And first, the spirit of penance and of mortification gains much by the exercise of the life of faith, an all-supernatural life, a life which we may call divine, since it puts the soul in relation with and unites it to the designs, the sentiments and the actions of God—which can only exist by the privation of and the absolute detachment from all that can flatter nature and self-love. In truth, where is the soul that can live at one and the same time a life full of human consolation and according to natural inclination and a life of faith such as we have just described it? “No man can serve two masters”—the Eternal Truth Himself has told us this, and daily experience goes to confirm it.

Ask a soul which is the slave of its self-love, ask her Who God is; where He dwells; how He acts in His relations with His creatures; how they may glorify Him, love Him perfectly, unite themselves to Him even here below and find Him everywhere; ask her what grace is, what effect it produces in souls; by what means it is communicated; how it may be turned to profit, etc. This soul will not know what to answer. If, on the contrary, you ask her what means to take to flatter the senses, to satisfy our inclinations, to procure the pleasures, the delights, the enjoyments, and the conveniences of life, you will find her very learned, she can give you all kinds of directions for this purpose.

If you now interrogate a soul that is a true servant of God and put to her the same questions, you will see the difference. Enlightened by faith, taught at the school of the Holy Spirit, she will perhaps astonish learned doctors although she has never studied human sciences; she will understand a great many spiritual things unknown to the most intelligent. And why is this? Because she has brought her nature into subjection by penance, mortification and forgetfulness of self that nothing might prevent her from belonging to God and possessing Him within her. Examine her actions and her whole conduct: you will

see a continual mortification, privations of all kinds, contempt for all that passes away, that flatters, distracts or delights human nature! She lives in a body, it is true, but she considers it as a prison; she endeavors to escape from it by faith, or by weakening its walls by penance. She lives and acts upon earth, it is true, but she is there as though she were not; her mind is elevated by faith into another region, a region which is supernatural and divine. She communicates with creatures, it is true; she makes use of them according to the order established by their Creator; but she uses them as though she used them not; she transports herself by faith into a supernatural world, her conversation is with God and with the heavenly spirits. The eyes of her body see the things which surround her; but her look stops not upon them; she makes use of the eyes of faith to see the precious pearl hidden therein: God in His creatures.// This happy soul regards as dust, as a vapor, all that passes away; after the example of St. Paul she despises herself as the refuse of this world; what the world appreciates is for her only dung; but in this vapor, in this dust, in this refuse of the world, in this dung, she finds by faith the true precious pearl which worldlings strive in vain to find.

But can all this be done without the spirit and the practice of mortification? Is it not, on the contrary, the destruction of the life of nature? I know that only the total destruction of our being by death can procure to the soul the clear vision of God, such as St. Paul desired when he cried out: "Who will deliver me from the body of this death?" but while awaiting this there is another kind of destruction which penance, mortification and self-abnegation operate. Thanks to this destruction our soul, disengaged, so to speak, from matter, perceives with the eye of faith that God Whom it loves and Whom it seeks; thus it is, at one and the same time, upon this miserable earth and in Heaven . . . But let us repeat again: there is no life of faith without the spirit of penance, that first characteristic of our Order. /-

While examining well what we have just said, we

1 - see arise also the spirit of prayer and of union with God, that second characteristic of the spirit of Carmel. The soul that lives by faith lives already, as we have just said, in a supernatural region, being herself supernaturalized by interior and exterior mortification she participates in the privileges of those spirits who are disengaged from matter, who penetrate everywhere, even through closed doors. It is faith which leads and enlightens her, which enables her to penetrate the obscurity of things and the events of life and see the gift of God and God Himself operating with wisdom, justice, mercy and love, all of which greatly favors her union with God Whose presence is to her so habitual and so familiar. Thus what means of communication with Him does it not afford her in all events and in every circumstance! What wise and serious thoughts upon all that passes within and around her! . . . What noble, generous and heroic sentiments! . . . What elevations of heart, what fervent prayers! . . . How can she but become perfect in approaching nearer and nearer, by faith, to Him Who is perfection by essence? She cannot but adore, be attentive to and love with all her strength Him Whom she sees always and everywhere acting only for His Own glory and for our good!

As we have already said, the soul that lives by faith lives according to God; now to live according to God, is not this to live by prayer, by love and by union? Do we not unite ourselves to the food which nourishes us? When by faith we discover some new mystery of love, of mercy, of providence, etc., the soul finds there its food; the Will and the good pleasure of God also become its nourishment when faith discloses them to it. Is not the spirit of prayer here intimately united to faith, and to such a degree that, so to speak, they are one and the same thing?

If we now examine the life of faith in regard to the virtues to be practised and the combats to be sustained in the spiritual life, again we find an increase of the spirit of prayer; for we are so weak that, when there is question of doing violence to ourselves, or of struggling against the current of our natural inclinations,

we feel the need of seeking strength and of begging aid. And to whom can we go? Of whom can we beg them if not of Thee, O my God! of Thee Whom faith shows me present everywhere, always disposed to do me good; ever ready to open to me the treasures of Thy mercy; ever waiting only for a suppliant glance in order to give me light, strength and grace in greater abundance than I could dare to hope for; ever regarding me with compassion, kindness and love, giving me to understand the desire Thou hast to see me act and combat for the interest of Thy glory; ever asking of me some act of virtue and furnishing me with the occasion of practising it through the means of persons or events. At one time it is an act of humility, at another an act of charity, of patience, of meekness, of devotedness. For all this I must do violence to myself, I need grace . . . And it is prayer, aided by a lively and active faith, which will obtain it for me.

When, by faith, a contemplative soul goes successively through Heaven, earth and hell; when the eye of faith shows her something of God, of His nature, of His infinite perfections, of His glory, of the happiness with which He fills His elect; when it shows her the multitude of sinners upon the earth who outrage a God so great and so good, who do not recognize Him and who despise His laws, who deprive themselves of the recompenses which He promises them to precipitate themselves into eternal flames; can this soul prevent herself from experiencing sentiments of compassion for these poor blinded ones, and of zeal to procure the cure of their spiritual blindness, that they might see and recognize Him Who created them only to render them happy, and to open Heaven to them by leading them along the path which brings them there?

3 — And thus it is that zeal, the third characteristic of the spirit of Carmel, greatly increases by a life of faith. Can one be an apostle either by action, prayer, or sacrifice, without a lively, firm and active faith? No; without this ardent and perfect faith should we have had a St. Peter, a St. Paul, a St. Francis Xavier who burned with a zeal so ardent, so indefatigable,

and so fruitful? Should we have had a Teresa whose heart zeal devoured and made of her an apostle by the vehemence of her desires, the power of her prayer, the efficacy of her self-immolation, and lastly, by her words, her writings and her example? Without this lively faith should we see during all centuries, even in our own days, in all classes of society, so many apostolic souls animated with so great a zeal and laboring with so much devotedness for the glory of God and the salvation of their brethren?

Let us cast a look upon our great family of Carmel and upon ourselves, to see if we are devoured with the zeal of Elias and of Teresa as were those who have preceded us, as even now are so many others enrolled under the same standard as ourselves. If this fire burns not within our hearts, to what must we attribute it? To our want of faith which has allowed the spirit of penance and of mortification to become extinguished within us, which has made the spirit of prayer, that essential nourishment of the spirit of zeal, to fail. Yes, it is impossible to be animated with true zeal without being united to God by prayer, without the constant practice of renunciation and of self-abnegation, in fine, without a life of faith, which enlightens, dilates and animates all the faculties of the soul and makes them operate in union with God and for His greater glory, despite the egotism, the passions and the repugnances of nature The exercise of zeal is perfect only when the soul forgets herself, when she keeps herself, as far as this is possible to human weakness, in those supernatural regions of faith which show her, in all circumstances, God alone, His Will, His glory.

And it is to this that we, as children of Carmel, are called. The perfect practice of our holy Rule, and particularly that point of it upon which we now meditate, ought to conduct us to it. The more faithfully we apply ourselves with an interior spirit to this Rule, the more light and strength we shall acquire to advance in the way it traces out for us. Let us, then, exercise the arm of our soul in bearing the shield of faith and in placing it between ourselves

and the temptations which on all sides assail us. Thus shall we be victorious and please the Heart of our Good Master.

THIRD POINT

Examples

Whence proceed the heroic actions which we admire in the Old and New Testament? Has not faith been their principle, their companion and their guide? Without the faith of Abraham, could history teach us by his example what perfect obedience, carried even to heroism, is? Abraham believed in God upon the infallibility of His word and the fidelity of His promises. This is why, without resistance and without delay, he quits the paternal roof, he leaves the land in which he dwells, and directs his steps towards the place which is to be designated to him only later on. Magnificent promises have been made Him in favor of his posterity, and he awaits their accomplishment, although in the natural order all things seem to oppose them. A son is given to him by miracle; in this son he will, no doubt, realize the promises of the Lord. . . . Nevertheless, this beloved son, this Isaac in whom all the hopes of the holy Patriarch are centered, is designated to him as a victim; he must be immolated before having left any posterity! The order is precise and seems to contradict what had been previously announced; but the man of God, the man of great faith, expects against all contrary appearance: he hopes against hope! . . . "God will provide," says he, first in his heart; "God will provide," he afterwards says prophetically to his son who asked him where the victim was. Abraham has no doubt of God's promises; he goes forward, he thinks only of executing the order received; his faith sustains him in an action so hard to his paternal heart, so painful to his reason. The sacrificial altar is erected; Isaac is bound and placed upon it. Abraham seizes the knife which, so it seems, is to destroy all his hopes by causing the death of his son; but his faith wavers not. He raises his arm . . . He is about to strike: "Stop, Abraham, stop," cries a voice to him from

Heaven . . . and God recompenses a faith so firm, so constant, so obedient, so heroic: Isaac shall be the father of a great people, as had been predicted to him. A ram, led there by Providence, is to be immolated in place of this cherished son, and the holy Patriarch will have all the merit of the sacrifice which he was ready to consummate!

The faith of Moses, praying upon the mountain, obtains for his people a signal victory; it is the same faith with which he divides the waters of the Red Sea, permitting the people of God to pass over dry shod and to depart out of Egypt. Again, his faith causes the manna to fall in the desert and operates a number of other miracles in favor of the people of Israel. But this faith so lively, hesitates a moment in a single circumstance and God, although so good, punishes His servant by preventing him from entering into the Promised Land, to show how greatly He desires to see His children live by pure faith.

All the virtues rest upon faith and shine more or less according as faith is more or less lively; by going through all the classes of Saints we can recognize that it is the greatness of their faith which has rendered them models in the practice of the most sublime virtues. As to the charity, the constancy, and the fidelity of the Patriarchs and Prophets; the zeal and devotedness of the Apostles; the generosity and patience of the Martyrs; the penitence and fervor of the Anchorets, of the Solitaries and Hermits; the obedience, submission and meekness of holy Religious of both sexes; in fine, the heroic virtues which we admire in the holy Women and Confessors, upon the throne as well as in the thatched cottage, is it not faith which has produced all this? It is meditation upon the truths of faith which has conducted to the cloisters and to the deserts so great a number of chosen souls; that sole word "Eternity," profoundly weighed in a spirit of faith, has sufficed to disabuse them of a regard for the false pleasures of the world; and this other word: God alone! weighed and considered with faith, has led many others to detach themselves from themselves and to lead a life entirely

united to God by the practice of obedience and humility.

Our holy Mother St. Teresa, a model of this spirit of faith, saw God in all things; the voice of lawful authority was for her what the voice of God was for Abraham and the other Prophets. Our Lord Himself spoke to her often and very clearly, it is true, but pure faith always guided her when there was a question of acting, and she conformed herself by preference to the orders of Superiors and Directors, even when what they said seemed in direct opposition to what God had told her. And our Lord Himself made known to her that her conduct on such occasions was very agreeable to Him. She sought only and sincerely the glory of God in the establishment of her Reform. Was it not the Will of God that she should labor at it? But our holy Mother St. Teresa was first to give to the entire universe an example of obedience and of the spirit of faith. Her Superiors bade her think no longer of her project, and she did not permit herself to do so during a considerable time, returning to it only after new orders from Heaven. God intimates these orders to her, and Teresa burns with a desire to execute them; for the greatness of her faith showed her the whole earth covered with iniquities, her Lord forgotten, offended by heretics and bad Christians, too little loved even by those whom He had chosen for His own. Nevertheless, she put her hand to the work only when supported by obedience, and her indomitable faith, which made her surmount all obstacles, undertakes, conducts and accomplishes this work in its perfection, despite the world and the demon, despite everything that appeared capable of preventing its execution.

She who, by the spirit of God, knew how to act with such courage and greatness of soul in so astonishing an enterprise, was not less admirable in the minute details of the practices of Religious life, by the spirit of faith with which she accomplished them and with which she conformed herself in all things to obedience. Her faith showed her this last virtue as the only means of glorifying God and of always

doing His holy Will. She Who received so much light and strength in prayer, feared not to leave this holy exercise through obedience, saying on this subject these remarkable words: "When God commands an important action in His service, would it not be strange for us to wish to remain in prayer because we find in it more pleasure than in executing His Will? A pleasant means, indeed, of advancing in His Love which thus ties His hands, pretending that He must conduct us by the way which is most agreeable to ourselves! . . .

"O my Lord and my God! how elevated are Thy thoughts above the vileness of our thoughts! Thou dost require but one thing of a soul resolved to love Thee and who places herself entirely in Thy hands: and that is to obey, to seek in all things what will procure Thee the greatest glory and to have an ardent desire to execute it. Her will being entirely in Thy power, it no longer belongs to her to seek, to choose the ways by which to go to Thee; it is Thou, O Divine Master! who hast this solicitude and who chargest Thyself with the care of conducting her by the way which is most advantageous to her. When in the distribution of employments the Superior thinks only of the general good of the Community, Thou, my God, loseth not sight of what is useful to us; Thou dost dispose of all things for our advantage, Thou taketh a particular care of our souls, and we afterwards find ourselves, without knowing how, so advanced in the spiritual life that we are astonished at it ourselves." This great Mistress of the spiritual life, this model of a life of faith, feared not to say that she found God as well in the kitchen, among the pots and kettles, as anywhere else; and also that He assists us there, interiorly and exteriorly, in proportion to the spirit of faith which He finds in us.

"In what does sovereign perfection consist? Evidently, not in interior consolations, sublime ecstasies, visions and the gift of prophecy; but it consists in rendering our will so perfectly conformable and submissive to that of God that we embrace with all our heart what He wills, and that we accept with the same

joy what is bitter and what is sweet, as soon as we know that such is His good pleasure. This is very difficult, I acknowledge, not, in fact, to do things so contrary to nature, but to do them with pleasure. Nevertheless, such is the strength of perfect love that it forgets its own pleasure to think only of that of its Beloved. It is certain that, however great our sufferings may be, they appear light to us when we think that they are agreeable to God; and it is thus that heroic souls succeed in suffering with joy persecutions, outrages and ignominy.

“This is so certain, so clear and so well known that it would be superfluous for me to stop longer upon the subject. But what could I not say here about the efforts which the envy of the demon, the world, and our own sensuality make to prevent us from following the lights of reason! But I am in haste to point out how we may put an end to this interior combat, etc. . . .”

And this means our holy Mother found only in submission to our Superiors, in a spirit of faith; telling us that this submission is so agreeable to God that when, after many combats, our will at last becomes subject to the law of obedience, this good God give us so great a power over ourself that we become mistress of it; then He purifies our will to such a degree, by uniting it to His Own, that we can employ it in His service in the most perfect manner. And it was thus that the spirit of faith conducted our holy Mother St. Teresa to that high perfection which we can neither sufficiently admire nor imitate.

Our Blessed Mothers and Sisters in Religion also offer us wonderful examples of the spirit of faith. In one of the first houses of our holy Order, a Religious was sick and confined to bed for a long time, her bones being somewhat dislocated. The Prioress, inspired by God, ordered her to arise and follow her; the admirably obedient Religious did so immediately, thinking that the command came only from God. However, in walking, she leaned slightly against the wall, but the Prioress reproved her for it telling her that she ought not to walk thus; and the holy Re-

ligious, without making any reply, walked without support, and was thus cured because she believed in these words of God: "He who heareth you heareth Me"

Another sick Religious being reduced to the last extremity, her Infirmarian went at once to inform the Prioress who was at Matins, that she might come and assist her in her last moments. But the Prioress, acting through a divine inspiration, instead of going to the Infirmary, sent word to the sick Sister to come to her in the Choir; she did so immediately; and her miraculous cure showed how great had been her faith.

In the Convent of our Fathers at Pastrana, the obedience practised in a spirit of faith was admirable and often recompensed by miracles. Such was that of a Brother who was told to light wood without a match by simply blowing upon it; and this being done, a flame immediately appeared!—and another who was told to go and catch a little bird that was singing in the garden; he went immediately, took it in his hand without any difficulty, and brought it to his Superior. He, wishing to see if the little bird had not a wound which prevented it from flying, gave it its liberty, and the bird flew away freely, to the great admiration of all who were present.

In the Holy Gospel we see how our Lord praises the faith of the Centurion and of the Canaanite woman, and this should lead us to imitate that faith of which humility was the principal feature.

The Blessed Virgin and her holy Spouse also give us bright examples of that life of pure faith to which we are called. We see them, without reply, without murmur, equally submissive and obedient to the Will of God, whether it be manifested to them by the prescriptions of the law, the authority of the Roman Governors, or messengers from Heaven. The pagan Emperor orders the enrollment of his subjects, which obliges Mary and Joseph to a painful inconvenience, in a rigorous season and in embarrassing circumstances. They set out without delay, with the same submission as when the Angel sent from God intimates to them the order to go into Egypt. Does the law ordain ceremonies from which their excep-

tional situation seems to dispense them? They take care not to free themselves from it. The law is an expression of the Will of God; they submit to it since they have not a formal dispensation. Thus Mary, as pure and holy as she is, will go to the Temple to be purified like other women. They perform their duty in a spirit of faith: Joseph commands Mary, although he is her inferior in sanctity, and Mary obeys him because this is the order established by God. Jesus obeys Mary and Joseph, because the law of God ordains that children should be submissive to their parents.

And, during all His mortal life, has not our Lord given us the example of a soul whose conduct is animated by faith? I know well that there is a great difference between the knowledge that our Lord Jesus Christ had of the Will of His Father, and that which we can have; for, being God, He had the clear vision of it, while we only perceive it darkly, by means of faith; nevertheless, as Man, He also felt opposition and natural repugnances. But we always see Him acting contrary to the instinct of nature in order to conform Himself in all things to the Will of His heavenly Father . . . If He works miracles, it is in the same manner as other men, that is to say, by invoking the Lord; if He multiplies bread and fish, it is after having raised His eyes to Heaven as if to beg the assistance of His Father; if He resuscitates Lazarus, it is after having prayed. During His sorrowful Passion the thought of accomplishing the Divine Will sustained and strengthened Him. He knew that it was necessary all should be fully accomplished and He said nothing, He did nothing that could place an obstacle in the way. He obeyed even His murderers! . . .

Faith also tells us that the Will of God lies in our work, in our sufferings, in our crosses, from whatever source they come; then, after the example of Jesus and in union with Him, let us adore God in all these things; let us submit to His Will, relying upon His promises, and we shall have His grace in time, and the happiness of possessing Him during all eternity.

FOURTH POINT

Examen

Let us now examine how we stand in regard to faith, if we wear this shield and if we know how to make use of it.

Have we not neglected to become instructed in all that concerns this beautiful virtue? . . . Do we understand well the Creed, that symbol of our faith? We say it so often! But how do we say it? If we would take care to meditate upon it sometimes, article by article, it would furnish our soul with a nourishment capable of strengthening it for the service of God, Whose perfections and rights over His creatures we should understand a little better than we do. Our faith would become animated by the consideration of these great mysteries of our holy Religion: the Redemption of the human race wrought by the Incarnation, the Birth, the Life, the Death and the Resurrection of our Divine Savior. These consoling truths, and so many others which are the object of our faith, would strengthen our hope and give us more energy to practise virtue by overcoming nature.

Have we always had a great respect for the law of God, for the Holy Scripture, for the ceremonies and pious practices of Holy Church? . . . With how much levity must I not reproach myself upon this point, either in my conversations or in my actions! This is a proof of our want of faith; for if we were well penetrated with the thought of the sanctity of God Who has given us these laws, these customs, or these institutions, we should have nothing but respect and submission for all that comes from Him.

Have we prayed that faith might augment and shed its light in all hearts? Have we asked for ourselves this increase of faith? What have we done to remove the obstacles which prevent us from living the life of faith? Have we mortified our inclinations, our passions, our senses, our flesh, our interior faculties? Have we known how to shut the eyes of our body to open those of the soul, and to view things in God? Alas! how many times, on the contrary, blinded by the human way in which we regarded events, persons

and things, our soul has only considered their appearance, color, and accidents, according as the impression which our nature received was agreeable or otherwise! Oh! how many graces lost, which should have enriched our souls if, with the aid of faith, we had extracted them from the events and the creatures in which God had enclosed them for us! . . . For example, we have to treat of an affair with a person whose disposition, character and manners do not agree with ours; nature complains, takes all things in bad part, becomes disquieted and impatient. Even believing we see therein obstacles in the way of our salvation, because of the temptations to which we are exposed in these circumstances, we would wish to have nothing more to do with her.

If we regard all these things with an eye of faith, how entirely changed is the aspect! God appears in this creature, and makes us understand the desire He has of seeing us practise virtue; He seems to hold out His hand to us and say: "Give Me an act of humility at this moment when your self-love is wounded; . . . give me an act of silence, an act of meekness, instead of showing your discontent; . . . give me the alms of this renunciation of your own will, by obliging it to condescend or yield to that of another; abandon yourself entirely at this moment when you would wish to reject the cross! . . ." What a difference between these two ways of acting! One displeases God, wounds our neighbor and sullies the heart; the other pleases our good Master, edifies our neighbor and enriches our own soul; on one side all is lost, on the other all is gained. How important it is for us to reflect upon all this!

In our examens let us go through the different circumstances, the different events which make an agreeable or a painful impression upon us, and we shall find from what source they arise. If we discover there the seal of nature, let us quickly close our carnal eyes and open those of faith, to seek God alone and His Will beneath the outward appearance of all these things, afterwards leaving our soul to nourish and rejoice itself in this Divine Will alone. Let us

weep over our blindness which, according to the expression of our Lord Himself, makes us "cast to the dogs" so many choice morsels by which we could have profited so well had we known their excellence; so many practices of obedience, of forbearance, charity, humility, renunciation which are presented to us with graces as abundant as they are necessary for our souls, and which we reject because we find in them only weariness, trouble, or disgust! . . . Nevertheless, all our sanctity lies in this! . . .

Our soul dies of hunger if faith does not aid us to overcome nature in order to practise virtue. We are weak, we say, but why? It is because we shut ourselves up within ourselves. If, by faith, we sought God in all things, we should receive from Him that strength which produces virtuous actions. Yes, if we live according to nature we shall always be men, that is to say, weakness and misery; but if we live of God through faith, we shall, in a manner, be no longer ourselves, and when occasion requires, our strength will be superhuman. Let us then be profoundly humbled in seeing ourselves so far from this life of faith to which we are called by our vocation . . .

In frequenting the Sacraments have we acted with faith, seeking in them purely God and His glory. How many times, perhaps, have we not sought consolation and sweetness instead of that light and strength which is so necessary for finding God and His grace in all the events and trials of life? . . . How many times, regarding only the creature in the person of the Confessor, have we not been reserved in the manifestation of our conscience, being thus prevented from receiving with profit his advice and corrections? How many times have we been preoccupied at the time of holy Absolution, thus losing a great part of the fruit we ought to have drawn from it!

In our intercourse with our Superiors, do we show a spirit of faith, listening and speaking to them as to God Himself? If this were so we should have respected their words, their person, their actions; we should have been faithful in following their advice; we should have obeyed them blindly; we should have

acted in their regard with candor, uprightness of intention and simplicity But, alas! whence come all these reasonings against obedience, criticisms and reflections upon what those in authority do and say? that eagerness to obtain from them what we desire? that secret seeking after their esteem, their preference, their affection? All this comes from want of the spirit of faith.

And in our intercourse with our Sisters, with our companions in office who are either over us or under us, have we acted with a spirit of faith? Have we seen God in them? God Who makes use of their dispositions, of their manner of saying or doing things, for our advancement in virtue? If we had done so, our mutual intercourse would have been easy and agreeable, our manner full of mildness, thoughtfulness, charity and respect. But whence, then, come those movements of ill-humor and impatience, those unpleasant words, those little susceptibilities, those bitter and cutting replies, those suspicious and scrutinizing glances and those evil interpretations which are the consequence? Again, is it not a want of the spirit of faith, of feelings too human which make us stop at the creature?

If we had considered the holy Rules and the pious practices of our holy Order with the eyes of faith, what regularity would not have been remarked in our conduct! What perfection in our actions! What punctuality, what exactitude in regard to all our holy observances! what purity of intention in practices the most indifferent in appearance! And yet, whence comes that multitude of infractions of the customs of the Order: those light or curious glances, those little seekings after our own ease at the expense of religious deportment, mortification and, perhaps, even of modesty? Why, in fine, that want of regularity? Ah! if faith recalled to us on all these occasions either the presence of God or His good pleasure, our nature, willing or unwilling, would be obliged to submit

In what light have we considered the events of life, great or small? Public calamities, the loss of those dear to us, privations of all kinds, disappointments, mistakes, humiliations, painful labors, the rigor of the

seasons, inconveniences in our lodging, food and clothing: have we considered all these things with the eyes of faith. In this case we should have seen in the greatest scourges, as in the sting of an insect, and even in the degree of heat of a cup of tea, Divine Providence governing and directing all these events to ends glorious to God and profitable to our own soul. And, well persuaded of this, we should have shown on such occasions courage, patience, resignation, etc.

But, alas! if it has been otherwise, my carnal eyes have seen in these misfortunes and visitations only motives of discouragement, and in other events only subjects of complaint and murmuring. We accuse a Sister in one of the offices of showing a bad grace, another of awkwardness, this one of a want of attention and cleanliness, that one of having little charity. One by opening a window has permitted the gnats to torment us; another by closing it has wished to overwhelm us with the heat, etc., etc. From all this come a thousand imperfections: signs of discontent, blaming others, criticisms, in a word, serious faults against charity. Behold what results, in a greater or less degree, from a want of the spirit of faith in our intercourse with our Sisters.

Have we regarded temptations with the same spirit of faith? Have they been for us the source of abundant graces which, watering the soil of our soul, should have made it produce fruits of virtue for the glory of our Divine Master? If we had leaned upon God by faith, it would have been a source of strength for us during our combats and we should have come forth from them victorious. But, alas! we have not acted in this manner. And hence what sad defeats! what injuries! . . . Henceforth, then, let not the shield of faith leave our arm; far from depending upon ourselves, let us invoke our Lord in order to receive assistance and help; then, thus armed and fortified by His grace, let us not fear to trample our enemies under foot. This will be the means of glorifying our Lord, of making amends to His Sacred Heart for our former tepidity and shameful defeats.

CHAPTER TWELFTH—(Continued)

FOURTH MEDITATION.

FIRST POINT.

Text: *Take unto you the helmet of salvation that you may hope to be saved by your Savior alone, Who will save His people from their sins.*

The soldier of Christ ought also to have on a helmet to protect his head from the blows of his enemies. According to St. Paul this helmet is Hope, which resides in the superior part of the soul and defends it against the temptations of life. In Jesus Christ alone can we place our hope; if we do not, instead of a helmet of salvation, our head shall have on only a light covering easily pierced by the darts of the enemy. To have on the head this helmet of salvation is, then, to have our Lord seated in the superior part of our soul; it is to place in Him all our hopes, it is to expect from Him alone the aid necessary to reinstate us in our rights lost by sin, and to reach Heaven; it is to have Him in view in all our actions, uniting them to His; finally, it is to count upon His grace to practise virtue. Yes, all hope which is not founded on Jesus Christ is a vain hope. He alone has been given to us as our mediator; He alone can save His people from their sins: it is, then, only in Him and by Him that we can expect to be saved.

Let us try to make this important point of our holy Rule more clear; let us try to examine thoroughly: first, what we must understand by our spiritual head; secondly, the helmet which we should place thereon; thirdly, the manner in which we should place it, and fourthly, the dangers from which it preserves us.

I. The Masters of the spiritual life teach us that there are within us two parts very distinct and diametrically opposed one to the other. The first, called the superior, is the principal part; it constitutes what we really are; its operations are altogether spiritual, virtuous and even divine, for it makes spiritual things its principal nourishment. God resides there when all is well ordered. The second portion of ourselves, the inferior, is only the form, the delusive phantom of the first, for it gives us the appearance of being what we are not in reality; its opera-

tions are animal and sensual, it is even diabolic in its instincts and inclinations when the will gives power to the demon to turn them to his own profit. The exterior senses furnish it with an animal and material nourishment. The demon, alas! can often establish his reign in this inferior part; he can even extend it to the superior if it is not carefully guarded.

The first part, when well regulated, is justly regarded as the head of the spiritual man, governing him according to God, in God and for God. This head has eyes with which to contemplate divine things: these are the eyes of faith, upon the operations of which we have already meditated in the preceding Chapter. They are not opened to the things of earth, except to see them according to truth; that is to say, to recognize the nothingness which they are in themselves, to divest them of their false appearances, and to discover what God has hidden in them for His glory and our sanctification. Again, this head has ears with which we are permitted to hear the word of God and to listen to the lessons of the Divine Spirit instructing our soul in the secrets of the interior life. It has also a sense of taste for heavenly things, since it nourishes itself upon the law of God and His holy Will. It has the sense of smell whereby to enjoy the perfume of virtues and other flowers of Heaven. It is sensible to the touch of grace; that is to say, it understands its secret inspirations and inclines its will to execute what is commanded. This is the head where the true life of the spiritual man resides, by which he ought to govern himself and which he should carefully protect from the darts of his enemies by means of that helmet of salvation of which our holy Rule speaks; because it is this head at which all those who seek our ruin aim.

II. St. Paul has already taught us that this helmet is holy hope, the second theological virtue, by which we firmly hope that God will give us, through the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, His grace in this world and life eternal in the next. Our hope, then, is in Jesus Christ alone. I say that it cannot and should not be placed in any other than He: 1st, because He alone has the power to save us; 2nd, because He alone has the will to save us and has offered Himself for this purpose; 3rd, because the heavenly Father in accepting this offering has given us

with His only Son all the goods of grace and of glory; 4th, and lastly, because we ourselves have chosen Him for our hope and our portion through our Religious consecration, by freely answering His call.

1st.—Jesus Christ alone can save us: the thing is certain. After sin, degenerate man, the enemy of God, could not reinstate himself in his rights to a heavenly heritage; all reparation on his part would have been insufficient. The outrages committed against the Divinity could not be repaired by human means; in truth, the united merits of all creatures could have had no power to efface them. For this great work it was necessary that the wisdom of God, seconded by His love, should find the means of reconciling His mercy with His justice. The Man-God has effected this admirable reconciliation; by Him justice has been satisfied; by Him mercy is poured out upon all the earth; and by Him sanctity has become possible to us. St. Paul tells us: “As by the offense of one, unto all men to condemnation; so also by the justice of one, unto all men to justification of life.”

Here, then, is a powerful motive for us to confide in Jesus Christ! All spiritual help comes to us through Him; therefore to Him all the glory of our actions should redound. The Sacraments, instructions, good examples, in a word, all that contributes to our sanctification is profitable to us only through the merits of this Divine Savior; and in the same way our prayers, our good works, our acts of virtue, all that sanctifies us, have no value except through these same merits.

All must pass through the hands of His Son in order to be agreeable to the heavenly Father. And has not our Divine Savior taught us this by these words: “Whatsoever you ask the Father in my Name, He will give it unto you”, and by these others: “I am the Door, no one can enter into life except through me”? Ah! since Jesus Christ alone can save us, let us then place in Him alone all our hope.

2nd.—Not only can our Lord draw us out of the state to which sin has reduced us, but He has the will to do so, and a will which no one can call into question after the manifest proofs He has given of it. He offered Himself to His Father as our ransom, in order to remedy the evils caused by sin, to repair the outrage offered to the Di-

vinity and to be the Mediator between God and man. To pay our debts He has had recourse to admirable inventions. Making Himself Man without ceasing to be God, He has taken a body like unto ours and has clothed Himself with all our miseries; He has wished to live in our midst as one of us, teaching us by His words and by His works the way to Heaven; finally, He has willed to suffer and to die in order to satisfy the justice of His Father and to lead us after Him into the abode of His glory. What, then, has He not done, what does He not still do, to convince us that He has given Himself entirely to us?

Yes, He has willed to save us, notwithstanding the opposition of His inferior nature; His agony in the Garden of Olives is an unquestionable proof of this: so violent is the combat of this will against His human nature that He waters the earth with a sweat of blood; but His will gains the victory; Jesus rises full of courage and gives Himself up to the traitor who comes to seize Him. What prevents Him at this moment from escaping out of his hands as He formerly did from those of the Jews who wished to precipitate Him from the top of a high mountain? What prevents Him from causing the earth to open to swallow up the armed satellites who come to take Him and conduct Him to death as a malefactor? He had the power to do this. Did He not continually work miracles in favor of others? But Jesus willed to save us by giving His life for us. . . . "I am the Good Shepherd," He has said, "I give My life for My sheep." Remark well, He does not say that this life is taken from Him, but that He gives it. He, then, offered Himself to His heavenly Father to accomplish our redemption, and He afterwards gave Himself up to His murderers to consummate this work. Moreover, our Lord gave Himself to His disciples and to His Church even to the end of ages by the institution of the Eucharist; by which means He continues His voluntary office of Redeemer and of Savior, giving Himself to us with the abundance of His treasures and His merits. What new motives for our confidence!

3rd.—A third motive which ought to have a still greater power over our hearts is that the heavenly Father has willed, in His mercy, to give us His Son Jesus to be our Savior, and that He has given us, with Him and by Him,

all goods of nature, grace and glory. Yes, the heavenly Father has had our salvation so much at heart that He has given us and sacrificed for us His only Son, allowing all the weight of His anger to fall upon Him, in order to punish in Him our sins with which He was charged; and wishing to make us enter into the participation of the infinite merits of this sacrifice, He has placed Him, in a manner, at our disposal, that we may draw abundantly from this inexhaustible treasure. What shall we fear on the last day if, having confided ourselves to Jesus, we have turned to good account the gift which has been made us of Him? Shall we have any reason to fear when, after having cast ourselves into His arms, He takes us and presents us Himself to His Father? What shall we fear, I repeat, when His Divine Majesty shall recognize in the hands of His well-beloved Son His work repaired and become, thanks to Him, capable of causing His infinite mercy to shine forth forever.

Our Savior Who is Truth itself, having so often said to us that He did upon earth the Will of His Father, that He preached the doctrine of Him Who had sent Him, can we still doubt the good will of the Eternal Father in regard to our salvation? Yes, God has so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son to redeem it, how, after that, can we not have confidence? How can we not hope for all things through the merits of this good Savior Who has willed to become entirely ours that we might belong entirely to God? Ah! if we but knew the gift which has been given us in the Person of His Son, we should go to this fountain of living water which washes always all the stains of the soul, extinguishes the fire of concupiscence, and which carries it away in its impetuous current even to life eternal; yes, if we but knew the gift of God we should superabound in confidence in this Jesus, because His heavenly Father has given Him to us as a Savior.

4th.—Finally, let us add a fourth motive for our hope. We have chosen Jesus alone for our portion, giving up all our interests into His hands; confidence ought, then, to be the consequence of this abandonment, as it has been the motive of it. In effect, although it is true to say that we have not chosen our Lord but that He has first chosen us without any merit on our part, it is also true to

say that we have willed it, since the call of our Lord was conditional, depending on our good-will: "If thou wilt be My disciple, renounce thyself, take up thy cross and follow Me." It is, then, because we have really willed it that we have followed Him, and should we have done so if we had not had confidence in this Divine Savior, if we had not firmly hoped to find salvation and sanctity in this total abandonment of ourselves? Since confidence without bounds has determined our choice, it is also the necessary consequence of it. I add, moreover, that it ought to augment after our consecration to Jesus in the Religious life because He having then charged Himself specially with the care of us, finds Himself, so to speak, under the strict obligation of assisting us in proportion to the confidence and the abandonment with which we have given ourselves up into His hands. Is He not faithful to His promises? Now, He has promised, not once, but thousands of times, never to allow those to perish who give themselves to Him in truth.

When a friend assures me that he is willing and able to keep securely a treasure which I greatly prize, if I confide this treasure to him, do I not prove that I rely more upon his promises than upon my own vigilance? Does he not thus contract a strict obligation of watching carefully over the treasure which has been confided to him? Does he not become much more responsible than if, while keeping my treasure, I had only begged him to warn me of the risks or dangers which it might incur while in my own hands? It is very easy to apply this example to our present subject. Jesus is this friend, the only true friend . . . If He has given His life to save us when we should not have dared to ask so great a favor of Him, since we were His enemies, what will He not do when we have given ourselves entirely to Him without reserve and when by our Religious profession we have confided to Him our soul which is the dearest of our treasures? . . .

St. Paul tells us that Jesus Christ "according to the time died to save us", (and what were we then? . . .) "much more therefore, being now justified by His Blood, shall we be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son; much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by His life. And not only so; but also we glory

in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received reconciliation . . .” If then, according to the Apostle, the reconciled Christian ought to hope to be well received by the Father on account of Jesus Christ his Savior, what should not the Religious soul hope, she who has not only been reconciled, but glories in belonging to God through this same Jesus Whom she has freely chosen for her portion, thus corresponding by this voluntary choice to the one which He had made of her? Hope in Jesus is, then, the helmet which should protect our head from the arrows of our enemies . . .

III. But it is not sufficient to know that the most noble part of our spiritual being should be protected by the helmet of salvation, we should also understand the manner in which this helmet should be placed upon our head; that is to say, we should know how to encase, so to speak, the superior part of our soul in Jesus Christ by holy hope. This shall form the subject of a third consideration.

No; it does not suffice for us to know that our Lord is the way which leads to sanctity, and that hope gives us an entrance into this way; our conduct must also correspond to this hope and the purity of our intention must consolidate this confidence and render it efficacious.

It is, then, of faith that Jesus Christ alone can save us; but it is also true that He will not save us without our own co-operation, and, that our confidence in Him might be well founded, we must unite our action to His. It is true that He died to acquit us of our debts, offering to the Divine Justice a satisfaction of infinite value; but it is also true that this superabundant satisfaction is only applied to His mystic Body, the Church, in as much as it participates in the sufferings of its Divine Head. This portion of suffering, measured out differently to each soul, we must accept in order to make up what is wanting of the Passion of Jesus Christ in us who are His members, and thus complete the work of our salvation. We must adjust this helmet of grace on our head by uniting our thoughts, words, affections, sufferings, and all our actions to those of our Lord. To hope in our Divine Savior and not to live in Him is a vain hope; to hope in Him and not to take Him as the model, the object and the end of all our actions is a gross illusion; to hope in Him and not to fulfill the conditions upon which our hope de-

pend is to renounce salvation, since our Lord is relieved of His obligations if we do not fulfill the conditions required.

Thus, for example, our Lord promises pardon to an humble and contrite heart: if I nourish my self-love, if I neither seek to repair my faults nor to avoid them for the future, it is vain for me to expect pardon. Our Lord has promised me the gift of perfect sanctity upon conditions of my following Him and bearing my cross: if I fly from this cross by seeking all that can satisfy and flatter nature, He is freed from His promise, I have no longer any right to count upon it. Let us, then, ground our hope upon a life conformable to the intentions of Him in Whom it rests; let our intention be in all things conformable to His and our actions united to His, that they may be encased, so to speak, in our Lord as the head of the warrior fits in the helmet which he wears.

In making Himself Man, has not the Savior of the world accommodated Himself, in some sort, to our capacity? His life, His actions, His entire conduct, His doctrine, etc., are brought down to our level. We have, then, only to make use of them by conforming our lives to them and by this means to secure our hope. "I am the way," say our Lord; "he who followeth Me walketh not in darkness." "Not all who say: Lord, Lord! shall enter into life eternal; but only those who do the Will of My Father . . ." And what is meant by doing the Will of the heavenly Father if not to imitate our Lord Who lived only by this Will in the practice of every virtue? He has attached His merits to them, that whoever practices them in union with Him may merit eternal life. Let us never forget that this union with our Lord in all places, at all times and in all things, is the principal point in the great affair of salvation; and that to perfect this union we should possess an intimate knowledge of our Lord, of His thoughts, of His actions and of His doctrine, etc. This is acquired by a deep study of His mysteries and particularly by serious meditation, followed by practical applications and accompanied by a prayer more or less affective, which facilitates for the soul the exercise of the solid virtues which she discovers in this good Master. Then we should on such occasions examine our thoughts to see if they are conformable to those of our Lord, to

regulate them, and to unite them to His, as far as this is possible, by renouncing what we find in them contrary to His spirit. Let us do the same with regard to our desires; let our will receive them only when we find in them that conformity to those of our Divine Master which will permit us to unite them to His. This applies equally to our actions; let us determine to perform them only after assuring ourselves that our Lord would act in the same manner on a like occasion. And we may judge of this to a certain point, either by examining His conduct during His mortal life, or by studying carefully those of His maxims which are applicable to the circumstance in which we find ourselves.

For example, an occasion for practising an act of obedience or of humility presents itself and nature or self-love refuses it: well, what would Jesus have done on a like occasion? What teaching has He left us on this subject? Let us see if, by eluding this order, or obeying it with a bad grace, I am conforming myself to what the Holy Gospel teaches me concerning the obedience and the humility of our Savior; no, certainly not. What should I do then? Recall to mind as earnestly as possible the meekness and humility with which He was obedient unto death, and unite these acts of virtue, as also the intention with which I perform them, to His, for faith teaches me that it is He and not the creature Who directs all things. Acting thus, my confidence in Him is well founded; for, again, faith teaches me that to act as He did and in union with Him, while recognizing myself to be a useless servant, is to charge this good Master with the care of giving to our actions their lustre and required perfection. These actions are always defective in some points, since all our works are imperfect; but His merits cover their defects.

Let us, then, strive gently and with a good will to render ourselves conformable to our Lord, if we wish to place upon our head the helmet of salvation. Let us render ourselves, as He was, humble and obedient, patient and charitable, poor and chaste, detached from all things; let us practise, as He did, renunciation and self-abnegation; let us love, as He did, the Will of His heavenly Father in crosses and sufferings; with Him, let us be devoted, full of zeal for the glory of God and the good of souls; let us observe the Rule and the holy customs of our Order; in

a word, let us unite our whole being with all its movements so closely to Him that we may be, in some sort, His other self . . . And this is the only means of having our hope well founded; for then it will be founded on Jesus Christ alone.

IV. Lastly, we have proposed a fourth question which will form the matter for some practical applications: how and in what way does the helmet of salvation protect us?

Let us represent to ourselves a soul striving to unite to those of our Lord, her thoughts, her desires, her affections, all her impulses; purifying her intentions, referring all things to God, through Jesus Christ, and receiving all things from Him in like manner. Let us place her in presence of the enemies who make war against God, and against men because they belong to God. Jesus is at the head, that is to say, in the superior part of this soul, which He covers entirely; and in the same way that the helmet, which is always well seen, hides the head of the warrior, so Jesus Christ, Who covers the superior part of this soul, causes it to disappear and He alone appears in her, He Who is the terror of hell, the conqueror of the world and of the flesh! . . . Will not this soul, thus established in a state of perfect confidence in Jesus Christ, also be the terror of the demons? Will they dare to attack her? And, if they do attack her, will their arrows reach her? What can all the infernal powers do against Christ?

It is true that the demon dares to approach her as he approached our Lord in the desert after He had passed forty days there; but what happened? He was overcome, and the three arrows which he had the audacity to aim against our Savior were forcibly repulsed. And this is what happens to the soul of whom we speak, which is entirely hidden and, as it were, lost in our Lord by confidence and the union of her heart with His. Thus also, in all the temptations raised up by hell, confident recourse to and union with Jesus, the imitation of His conduct, the remembrance of His promises and the power of His grace, will be to our soul an impenetrable helmet, while, without it, these temptations would pierce our soul and cause its death.

Again, let us place this soul, ever protected by her heavenly armor, in the presence of all that the world and the spirit of the world can present to her view to seduce

her: their arrows cannot pierce her when she opposes to them, at one time the anathemas pronounced against them by the adorable mouth of her Savior, at another His maxims and His actions, entirely opposed to their own, and again His poverty, His humility, etc.; when, in fine, she relies entirely upon the magnificent promises which her good Master has made to those who prefer poverty to riches, sufferings to joys, humiliations to honors? . . .

Let the flesh and all domestic enemies come in their turn to attack this soul, to what will their efforts amount? Is not her head protected from their arrows by her confidence in Jesus Christ? When relatives and friends wish to occupy her thoughts with their affairs or their interests, at the expense of her religious duties and put her in danger of giving them something more than she owes them, she will oppose to this arrow these words of our Lord: "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me . . ." Is she tempted to follow her own will? She will remember that Jesus never did His even once during the whole course of His mortal life, and that He greatly loves those souls who nourish themselves, as He did, with the Will of God; that He calls them His "mother", His "brothers", and His "sisters" in preference to those who, in the natural order, have a right to these titles. Is she tempted to seek herself or to seek after the esteem of creatures? She will oppose to these arrows of the enemy these words of our Lord: "He who humbleth himself shall be exalted"; words which promise moreover, to satisfy her desire for exaltation or for glory, since they give her the certitude of being exalted in Heaven if she abases herself upon earth: that put here below in the last place, Jesus will cause her one day to ascend to the first place; that by becoming the servant of all in time, she will reign with Jesus for all eternity. Is she tempted to impatience, bitterness or suspicions against her neighbor? She will oppose to these arrows of the enemy the meekness, the patience and the charity of our Lord. Has solitude become wearisome to her? She will follow Jesus to the desert, to the Garden of Olives, to the silence of Nazareth, and uniting herself to Him in this hidden, penitential, solitary and laborious life, she will victoriously repel the temptation.

And so will it be with all the temptations to which our

feeble nature and the malice of our enemies expose us during this life. If, like St. Paul, we bear in our body the mortification of the Lord Jesus, if this same Jesus lives in us, and if our hope is solidly established in Him, then He will preserve us and we shall gain the victory.

Let us, then, apply ourselves in our meditations to the development of all the motives which we have for confiding in and abandoning ourselves without reserve to our Divine Savior; let us pass over in our mind the means which will assure us of this confidence and the inappreciable advantages which it procures for us when it is accompanied by prayer, the imitation of our Lord and the union of our heart with His by the practice of virtue. We have been able to give here only a few explanations concerning a matter so important; it will be brought more fully to light by meditating upon it ourselves.

SECOND POINT.

The soul who endeavors to practise this point of the Rule, who understands its true sense by looking at it from that point of view in which we have just considered it, must necessarily receive an increase of the spirit of our holy Order. To have on our head the helmet of salvation is to be in some sort another Jesus Christ, or at least to be clothed with Him in such a manner that He alone appears in all our actions, interior and exterior. This will make us understand what a spirit of penance and mortification should shine in us, to what exercises we ought to apply ourselves to destroy the "old man" and to allow Jesus Christ alone to live in us; it shows us to what restraints our hearts should submit to follow Him through the thorns, the humiliations and sorrows of Calvary!

How can a soul who is hidden in Jesus Christ live otherwise than in the manner in which He lived and consequently in seeking anything else but what He sought to testify His love and to save us? Or rather, how will it be possible for a soul to enter into Jesus Christ and hide herself in Him, as the head of a warrior is hidden in his helmet, if she does not measure herself to the measure of Jesus Christ by the practice of a universal and constant mortification? How can an unmortified spirit agree with the spirit of Jesus Christ? How can a soul who flies from penance be able to unite herself to Jesus

Christ Whose whole life was one of penance and mortification and Who will give us a share in His merits only in as much as we unite our penances and mortifications to His? How can our hope be well founded if, seeking only what flatters nature, we thus place ourselves in opposition to the life and maxims of our Lord?

The spirit of prayer, after what we have just said, ought also to increase greatly under this mysterious helmet. It is by exercising ourselves in those virtues which our Lord has taught us, either by His maxims or His example, that we form the helmet of salvation and place it upon our head. But this is not done without great interior labor, serious meditations and fervent prayer. To preserve this helmet during all the combats of life, an intimate union with our Lord is necessary, as we have already seen. Whence it follows that without prayer or union there is no divine life within us; without union there is no practice of virtue; without this practice, (or at least without tending to it), there is no hope; and without a firm hope no helmet to defend our soul. Now, without this helmet the head of the warrior has everything to fear from the arrows of the enemy.

It is, then, necessary to pray and to meditate without ceasing in order to know as much as possible this Jesus upon Whom all our hopes rest, to learn from Him how to practise virtue, and to obtain from Him light and strength to follow Him in the way of perfection. We must also meditate and pray always that Jesus, our hope, may aid us to discover the snares of our enemies and to escape their arrows. Again, we should watch, pray, and unite ourselves to Jesus Christ Who gave Himself and Who has been given to us as a Savior, to enter into the participation of His merits and to glorify God with Him and by Him, without which all our hopes are vain. We should in fine, live by prayer so as not to confide in ourselves nor in creatures, however good they may be, otherwise we shall unhappily be deceived.

Thus it is that the spirit of prayer gains considerably by that exercise which places the helmet of salvation firmly upon our head.

The spirit of zeal is also greatly strengthened because a soul clothed with Jesus Christ, transformed in Him by union and self-renunciation, cannot but act by His Divine

Spirit and for the greater glory of God and the good of souls. Like Him she seeks only this; she nourishes herself with this and lives only by it. Confiding in His mercy, she has given herself entirely to Jesus; there remains nothing for her to do after being freed from herself but to unite her action to that of her Divine Master to procure His glory and the salvation of souls. The conversion of sinners, the spiritual advancement of the just, the exaltation of the Holy Church, the knowledge of God and of His law spread throughout the universe, are the objects of her zeal. She prays, she suffers, she works for this in union with our Lord. She recognizes that of herself she can do nothing, that what she does has no value, but armed with the helmet of hope and strong with the confidence which she has in God through the merits of our Lord, she makes use of the gift which has been given to her in Jesus Christ, she employs His merits and His grace for the glory of God and the good of souls.

Her zeal is always acting, either for her own amendment and spiritual advancement, or for the needs of others, according to her power and the means God gives her. Nothing costs the soul who truly confides in our Lord and gives herself unreservedly to Him by the practice of solid virtue. She lives a life of penance, she overcomes all things by her prayer and union with God, in fine, she struggles on, notwithstanding the winds and the waves, to sustain the interests of her good Master. Jesus Christ is her light and her strength: and He is sufficient for her.

THIRD POINT.

Examples.

We find in St. Paul one of those warriors who, having taken the helmet of salvation, knew how to place it securely upon his head, that is to say, the superior portion of his soul, so as to be protected against the darts of his enemies. He shows us what this helmet is and teaches us the use to be made of it when he says that he gloried in his infirmities, but that he was strong in Him Who strengthened him. Again, this glorious Apostle has told us that his confidence was so great that he was sure that nothing could separate him from Jesus Christ to Whom he had given himself entirely and without reserve; to

such a point that he can add that it is no longer he who lives but Jesus Christ Who lives in him. St. Paul also was subjected to temptations of the flesh; but his confidence in the grace of Jesus Christ made him triumph. He was persecuted, but this grace sustained him; he was exposed to all sorts of dangers, but this grace delivered him from them; finally, he was conducted to torture, and by this same grace of Jesus Christ he gained his last victory over tyrants and over hell.

St. John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, had learned great secrets from Him while reposing upon His Sacred Heart, he had read in that Divine Heart what he afterwards transmitted to us for our instruction, and of which he made use to encourage himself, as well as the faithful of his own time, to have confidence in our Lord. Here are some passages from his first Epistle: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled; of the Word of Life; that which we have seen and have heard, we declare unto you, that you also may have fellowship with us, and our fellowship may be with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."

Then, after having told us that we must walk in the light if we would have fellowship with God, Who is Light, he shows us our sins effaced by the Blood of Jesus: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all iniquity". St. John, afterwards wishing to teach us how to repose our confidence in Jesus Christ, expresses himself in this manner: "My little children, these things I write unto you that you may not sin. But if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just: and He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. And by this we know that we have known Him, if we keep His commandments. He who saith that he knoweth Him and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him. But he that keepeth His word, in him in very deed the charity of God is perfected; and by this we know that we are in Him. He that saith that he abideth in Him, ought himself also to walk even as He walked."

Then, after some details upon the virtues which ought to be practised to do this, St. John again tells us that he who does the Will of God will remain in Him for all eternity, that those who exercise themselves in the practice of Christian virtues are strong, that the Word of God remains in them and that they have overcome the evil spirit. Then he adds: "These things have I written to you concerning them that seduce you . . . And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He shall appear we may have confidence and may not be confounded by Him at His coming . . ." Did not he who spoke thus have on the helmet of salvation?

It was because he had learned from our Lord Himself to confide in Him by the observance of His precepts. Is not this what we have already learned in the two first points of this Meditation? Is not this what we see more clearly still by the light of the great Apostle; and what our will has determined to put in practice?

When wanting in confidence we offend our Divine Master and deprive ourselves of great graces; because if He asks this confidence of us, it is because He wishes to aid us in proportion to this same confidence. How touching is that example which we read in the Holy Gospel! The bark of the Apostles being agitated by the waves, Jesus came to them during the night walking upon the water. They were troubled at the sight and exclaimed: "It is a spirit!" and in their terror they cried aloud. But Jesus said: "Have confidence: it is I, fear not." "Lord, if it be Thou," Peter replied, "command me to come to Thee." Then Jesus said to him: "Come!" And Peter descending from the bark walked upon the waters to go to his Master. Now, the violence of the wind made him fear; he hesitates; and commencing at once to sink, he cries out: "Lord, save me!" Jesus at once extends His hand: "O thou of little faith," says He, "why hast thou doubted?" Together they enter the bark and the wind is calmed . . .

What lessons for us in this example, so interesting and yet so simple. A temptation troubles us and Jesus appears, because He is our salvation. He approaches and we take Him for a spirit! Then He speaks, He invites us to have confidence in Him, we ask Him for graces which He grants us, but, if like Peter, we doubt for a

moment, the temptation regains its empire over us. Then we cry out to Jesus, and this good Master, while extending to us His hand to withdraw us from the danger, reproaches us for our want of confidence. All of this proves that the measure of our confidence is the measure of the graces and the aid which God grants us through His Divine Son . . .

Oh! how great was the confidence of those young Virgin Martyrs, Agnes, Agatha and so many others who, sustained by the grace and the promises of Jesus Christ, braved tyrants, their menaces and their tortures and came forth pure and intact from places where their virtue had been exposed. It is because they had a certain knowledge that the soul who has taken Jesus Christ for her portion and who places all her confidence in Him, shall never perish, however great her weakness and however great the dangers to which she may be exposed for His love.

St. Felicitas was very well convinced of this. She who could not, without uttering great cries, support corporal pains, replied to the jailers who, knowing her weakness, asked her what she would do in the presence of the ferocious beasts for whom she was destined: "Now it is I who suffer; but to-morrow another will sustain the assault and will suffer in my place." And this was in truth what happened. She who when left to herself, showed the weakness of nature in the midst of the pains of childbirth, displayed in the arena a superhuman courage, being clothed with Jesus Christ and sustained by His grace.

Our holy Mother St. Teresa who felt as though her whole being was torn asunder when she left the paternal roof to go to the Monastery of the Incarnation, and who during a long time found herself so weak that she recoiled before certain little sacrifices, not being able to renounce some human intimacies which, without making her lose the friendship of God, nevertheless kept her far below that perfection which He asked of her, afterwards displayed the most magnanimous courage, overthrowing and breaking through all that could be an obstacle to her advancement, all that opposed the designs of God in her regard. This happy change was worked when she clothed herself with our Lord by her confidence in Him, by her fidelity to His grace and by the imitation of His virtues, and when she had taken Him for her guide, for her light, her

strength, her hope, her all, by giving herself up to Him entirely and without reserve. It was then that, with this helmet on her head, she became terrible to hell by establishing this admirable Reform to which she calls by her example, much more than by her words, courageous souls who are capable of sustaining under her direction the combats of the Lord. It was then that presenting herself upon the field of battle with her plans of war formed under the dictation of the Holy Spirit, she enrolled under her standard that multitude of chosen souls who, under her laws and animated by her spirit, combatted so efficaciously with her and after her for the cause of the Church, and gave to the world such admirable examples of virtue. Behold what the power of grace has done in weak women when they renounced themselves to unite their hearts and their virtues to Jesus Christ.

Our Blessed Mother Ann of St. Bartholemew was, while in the world, so timid, so simple, that she scarcely dared to say a word to her brother about her religious vocation for fear of irritating him. Her little education and want of talent caused her to be received in Carmel as a Lay Sister and she seemed to recoil, when going to the Monastery, before the kind of life which she was about to embrace. Nevertheless, she became a column and a light of our holy Order, first in France, and then in Flanders where she founded several Monasteries in which she exercised with the greatest success the duties of Prioress and of Mistress of Novices. How was such a change brought about? Was it not due to her confidence in our Lord, her union with Him and her zeal in following and imitating Him in the practice of humility, obedience, charity, devotedness, and all other virtues? When she had placed upon her head this wonderful helmet, and when she had firmly secured it there with the Black Veil, which she was forced to receive after having so long refused it, then it was that, confiding with just reason in our Lord, she showed forth the strength, the courage and those rare qualities which God gave her, through this same Jesus Who was her hope and her all.

How many other Saints, men and women, who have had great combats to sustain, have gained signal victories by placing all their confidence in our Lord, after having taken care to pray, to imitate Him and to unite themselves

to Him in all things! We are weak; so were they; we have at our disposal the same means, the same weapons as they had; Jesus Who saved them wishes to be our Savior also; the same graces are offered to us; in fine, we know as well as they did that by drawing from the treasury of our Savior's merits in uniting ourselves to Him, by the practice of good works, by the Sacraments, by humiliations and sufferings, we can secure our sanctification and salvation as they secured theirs, by founding our hope upon Jesus Christ.

FOURTH POINT.

Examen.

Whence comes it that we are still so weak, that at the first attack we are wounded? Why do the least contradictions disconcert us and cast us down? Let us examine our intentions. Are they pure? Does the superior part of our soul hold the reins of government? does it govern according to the spirit of God, in conformity with His designs, in union with Him and with an intimate conviction that we can do all things through Him? Do we not, on the contrary, place all our confidence in our own industry and efforts, in our good will, in our little successes? Hence, what mistakes, defects, pitiable weakness, even at the moment when we believe that we are triumphing over the enemy! How many times have we not imagined that to correct a defect, to overcome a temptation, it sufficed simply to will it, but because we were wanting in confidence, our presumption has been punished by new faults into which we have shamefully fallen.

Have we placed all our confidence in our Lord and in the exercise of those virtues which He has taught us? Have we not had the temerity to rely upon His promises and His assistance when we refused to offer Him the acts of self-renunciation, humility, charity, etc., which He asked of us? And yet we know that it is only upon this condition that He promises us sanctification and salvation. Have we not put our confidence in some creature, imagining that upon our relations with her depended our spiritual advancement and salvation? . . . And what has resulted from it but eagerness, disquietude, trouble, the fear of losing her, anxious desires of communicating with her,

complaints and murmurs when sometimes deprived of doing so, and finally, our interior in a state of disorder which is more capable of turning us away from perfection than of conducting us to it . . .

Have we not placed too much reliance upon our practices of devotion and of penance, clinging to them with too much attachment and solicitude? Or, because they were not according to our taste, did we not perform them carelessly, without any confidence, forgetting that their efficacy depends more upon the grace of God than upon our own operation and that this grace acts more freely when its action is less perceived by us?

In order not to annul nor to lessen in the least possible way the effect of this grace, have we faithfully applied ourselves to do what lay in our power, performing our spiritual exercises and practising the Religious virtues, humbling ourselves for having acquitted ourselves of them so badly, and relying solely upon the goodness and mercy of Jesus, our only hope?

Have we known how to appreciate the graces which are given to us through this same Jesus, Who is so little known and loved and so badly served even by His privileged Spouses and friends? Have we known how to seek for and to find the grace which is hidden in all created things? Have we listened to their voice which warns us that Jesus is hidden in them with His Blood, His grace, and His Heart full of love and mercy? Ah! if we had heard and understood it, with what care should we not have gathered up that grace which inundates the earth, which so many tread under foot, and which we ourselves have often been so unhappy as to despise! Then what regularity there should have been in our conduct, what peace, what gentleness, what charity in our intercourse with our neighbor, notwithstanding the difference of our characters and opinions. As Jesus is there with His grace, we would give Him the consolation of seeing us receive and turn to account this grace; for this is the infallible means of obliging Him to keep to His promises, and consequently of establishing our hope in Him.

Have we taken care to study Jesus, to meditate upon the mysteries of His Life, particularly when upon certain feasts the Church recalls them to our remembrance in a more special manner? Do we apply ourselves to

study the maxims of our Lord, and do we in prayer nourish ourselves with His doctrine? Do we prove this by our conduct, so that whoever sees us act or hears us speak can recognize in us true disciples of Jesus, whose souls are, so to speak, transformed in Him by the imitation of His virtues? If this is so, all will find us meek and humble of heart, always devoted to the glory of God and the service of our neighbor, always attentive to the accomplishment of the Divine Will as manifested to us by the Rule, the voice of authority and the different events of life; in fine, always in the state of a victim of immolation in union with our Divine Savior.

Do we always keep close to the Sacred Humanity of our Lord in our prayers and in our daily conduct? Do we take Him for our companion our model, our confidant, our friend, which practice ordinarily gives us more facility in reaching perfection than when we consider Him separated from His Sacred Humanity? Our holy Mother St. Teresa expressly recommends this method, she returns to it several times, and says that experience has taught it to her; that if any one wishes to teach us the contrary we should not believe him; and that, as for herself, having wished during some time to consider our Lord only as God, she recognized that it was an illusion. She shows how important it is to consider this good Master both as God and Man, and she greatly recommends meditating upon His Life and Passion, saying that this is a way sheltered from all illusion and that even though she should find greater advantages in another way she would not desire them if they did not come to her through this Divine Savior, Who is the source of all good.

In temptations have we sheltered our soul under the helmet of salvation? Have we taken refuge in confidence in our Lord? Do we implore His assistance? Do we arm ourselves with some one of His maxims corresponding to our present need?

Are we grateful for the gift which God the Father has given us in the Person of His well-beloved Son? Ah! if we were mindful of this Gift of God, of the love with which He has given It, and what love He asks in return, should we ever offend Him? Should we not be constantly armed to prevent our enemies from snatching from us this precious Gift? Should not our vigilance be

continual that we might avoid, not only sin, but even the least imperfection?

If the goodness of God and the devotedness of our Lord towards us ought to give us great confidence, let us not forget the obligations which we have contracted in Their regard, in order that our confidence may not be vain. Let us hope for all things from God through our Lord, but let us fear much from our own weakness and malice. Let us establish in the superior part of our soul a true confidence in God joined to a great diffidence in ourselves; let us unite it to our Lord and this Divine Master will not permit the inferior part to have the least empire over it. Have we done so until now? Have we carefully distinguished between these two parts? Have we known how to separate them from each other: by uniting the superior part to our Lord and despising the inferior? Let us do this and we shall live by the grace of our Savior. Amen.

CHAPTER TWELFTH—(Continued)

FIFTH MEDITATION.

FIRST POINT.

Text: Let the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, abound in your lips and hearts, and whatever you do, be it done in the Name of the Lord.

The warrior should not only shield himself from the fiery darts and other arrows directed against him, by providing himself with defensive weapons, as we have seen in the preceding Meditations, but he must also defend himself from his enemies by weapons of attack conformable to the militia in which he is enrolled. St Paul gives to the soldier of Jesus Christ the sword of the word of God; this same sword our holy Rule gives to us that we may use it the more frequently since our life, particularly our Religious life, is a continual combat, and because this sword is very necessary to cast down our enemies. Let us then study this weapon in order that we may know how to make use of it according to the designs of God; and for this reason let us try to understand well its excellence, the dispositions with which we should employ it, and the use which we should make of it.

I. God alone knows perfectly the excellence of His word. If we wish to know it according to the measure of our capacity, we must approach as nearly as possible to God by purifying and detaching ourselves from all that is not God and that could obscure the understanding. Then this understanding thus disengaged and drawn nearer to God will see in His light how excellent is this divine word considered in its principle, in its effects and in its end; because we can only declare a thing to be good and excellent when, having examined it from these three points of view, we find that it is so.

The Apostle St. John, that soul so pure and so disengaged from all things, whose flight was elevated even to the bosom of God, tells us what the principle of this divine word is; and knowing beside that God has only one Word within Himself, by which He repeats eternally all that He is and all that He does, St. John teaches what this Divine Word is, Whose generation is eternal and divine. "In the beginning was the Word; and the Word

was with God, and the Word was God". Behold in Its principle, the excellence of this consubstantial Word of the Father, as holy, as ancient, as God Himself, since It is God. Again the Apostle shows us the excellence of this Word in Its effects and in Its works: "The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was made nothing that was made". In truth, we see that God created all things by His Word. It sufficed for Him to say: "Be it done!" and it was done, . . . so this excellent Word Which He speaks within Himself from all eternity God has manifested in time by the admirable works which fall under our senses. All that exists has been made by this Word: Heaven, the earth, and all that they contain, men and angels; in a word, all creatures, animate or inanimate, corporeal or spiritual, are the work of the Divine Word: "God spoke and all things were made!"

Not only is the Creation the work of His hand but also the Redemption of the human race; and this last is the grand manifestation of the Word of God, showing Himself to us clothed in our humanity. "Nothing", in the order of nature as well as in the order of grace, "was made without Him," as St. John tells us; and he adds: "In Him was life and the Life was the light of men". Then, all that have existence and life have derived this life and existence from Him, natural as well as supernatural life. (And by the life of nature I do not here understand that life which the Masters of spirituality condemn and which we should rather call death, since it is the life of sin and of degraded nature; but I speak of that life by which the body, being united to the soul acts and operates.) In giving us this natural life which we have in common with animals and all other creatures, the Word of God has also given us the life of grace by clothing Himself with our flesh and charging Himself with the obligation of paying the great debt which we had contracted by sin. "In Him was life and the Life was the light of men." It was by the incarnation that the Divine Word manifested Himself. He came to enlighten the world and to shed His light in the hearts of all men to show them the truth which was in Him: "That was the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world". He came, then, to enlighten us upon the de-

formity of sin, the outrage which it offers to God and the injury it does to ourselves; He came to make known the perfections of God, and the love which He bears us; He came to show us how far His mercy extends, the means which we ought to take in order to receive its effects, and what virtues we should practise to render the grace of Redemption efficacious; He came to trace out the way which we should follow to go to Heaven; and what is this way? "I am the Way," He tells us; "I am the light of the world. He who followeth Me walketh not in darkness." He came to enlighten us upon the nothingness of the world and the contempt which we should have for it, the great advantages of renouncing ourselves and all cupidity; He came to make known to us the value of suffering, the merit of obedience, the treasure of poverty and the wisdom of humility of heart. What brilliant lights has He not shed upon all things by showing Himself to man, and by being the first to walk in the way of virtue!

"And the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us, and we have seen His glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." The Divine Word Who became Incarnate, Who showed Himself upon earth, is the only Son of the Father; it was in poverty, humiliation, suffering and self-annihilation that He caused His glory to appear. What light for the soul who is born of God, who divests itself of the flesh, and who considers all things with the eyes of faith! . . . Ah! let us not cease to study this in-created Word; we shall thereby find life, light and strength, for these are the effects which It produces and which ought to render It exceedingly precious to us. What are we without life? What can we do without light? What do we do without strength?

This Divine Word Who has done all that was necessary to redeem man and to glorify God eternally is, then, very excellent, It is excellent in Its principle and in Its works, but It is much more so in Its end, which is the glory of God. If this Divine Word has created the heavens and the stars, the earth and all creatures, men and Angels, it is that all these works might glorify God. If He has restored life to our souls dead to God by sin, if He has shed upon them His light and His grace, if He has given them supernatural strength, it is that our souls might glorify

the Lord, either by the manifestation of His mercy, or by acts of virtue which cause us to conquer the demon, despise the world, overcome ourselves and become true children of our heavenly Father.

Nevertheless, let us distinguish here, in order to avoid that confusion which may lead us into error, let us distinguish, I say, the Eternal and Interior Word of God from His exterior word: the first Which is consubstantial with Himself, Which He engenders in His eternally fruitful Bosom, is His only Son, His Word, God like Himself; the second, which He articulates through the organ of His creatures, becomes His supple and docile instrument which He does not produce, like the first, from His Divine Substance, but which is expressed and manifested under the form of human language in order that it may bring down to the level of our weakness the perfections of His Being, His designs and His Will.

It is this exterior word which has been put upon the lips of His inspired Prophets, or made known to those who have written under the dictation of the Spirit of God. Again, it is this exterior word which has resounded with strength and an incomparable charm from the lips of the Word made flesh; which the Apostles have carried even to the extremities of the world by their preaching and by their inspired Epistles; which the Evangelists have written under the dictation of the Holy Spirit to be preserved and propagated throughout the ages; in a word, it is the revealed word such as it is contained in the Holy Scriptures. This word is also truly divine; not because it is God, like the Word of which we have spoken, but because it has God for its author, the sacred Writers having been only His organs and His instruments to make known to us what He is in Himself, what He has done for us, and what He desires from us: a word infinitely worthy of all our respect. Thus a Bishop of Arles, the illustrious St. Cesarius, feared not to say that the divine word is not worth less than the Body of Jesus Christ. It is the same divine word, revealed and contained in the Holy Scriptures, which St. Paul, in the passage cited above by our holy Rule, calls the sword of the spirit; and it is this which we shall have principally in view in the practical application of the point upon which we now meditate.

II. With what dispositions should we receive the divine word? In order to reply to this question we should consider: 1st, Who is He Who has given us so excellent a gift; 2nd, with what love and liberality He has given it; 3rd, for what ends and upon what conditions.

1st.—Although this gift is so excellent in itself, the dignity of Him Who has given it enhances its value. The Giver is that God so great, so powerful, so wise, so good, so perfect, and Whom we have forgotten and outraged; that God Who has no need of us, Who suffices for Himself, and Who by a single act of His Will could annihilate us; it is that great God Who lowers Himself to our baseness to renew relations with the children of a proscribed race, making use for this of the divine Scriptures which, according to St. Gregory, are letters full of love which the heavenly Father sends to His exiled children, to console and sustain them while expecting the promised Liberator.

2nd.—With what liberality has not God given us this gift! He made use of the ministry of Angels to send His word, His promises and His orders to the Patriarchs; then He sent His Prophets as His interpreters and His organs; age by age they succeeded one another, speaking or writing under the dictation of God and under the movement of the Holy Spirit. Lastly, He sent us His Own Son; this is not saying enough: He gave Him to us because of the great love He bore us! For the Divine Word becoming our Brother by the Incarnation is really ours: His Blood poured out is the price of our ransom; His flesh has become our nourishment and perpetuates His presence among us; finally, His word is the food of our understanding and the true bread of life which has come down from Heaven. After having opened the mouths of His Prophets under the Old Law, the Son of God made Man opens His own to communicate to us the treasures of knowledge and wisdom of which He possesses the plenitude. "Never has man spoken like this man", cried out the ravished multitude; and under the spell of what they felt while listening to His heavenly doctrine they went so far as to forget the care of providing for themselves material food.

His Apostles gathered up His word in order to preach it to all the peoples of the earth; the Church which He had Himself founded received this sacred deposit with the

mission to preserve it and to interpret it with infallible authority. The Doctors comment upon this divine word or vindicate it in the attacks to which it is exposed; its Ministers explain it and bring it down to the level of the most ignorant and the most lowly. Lastly, not content with having instructed us Himself, our Divine Preceptor sends us also His Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, to continue and to perfect His work, either in the bosom of His Church, which He preserves from all error, or in the souls of the faithful which He inclines to receive with respect and docility the holy word, giving them at the same time His grace in order to make it fructify. Oh, then, how munificent and liberal has not our great God shown Himself in the gift which He has made to men of His word! . . .

Let us now see upon what conditions and for what purpose He has made us this inestimable gift. Considering it as a weapon of defense, as our holy Rule, in imitation of St. Paul, calls it, we need only to remind ourselves of what the intentions of a Prince must be when he gives a weapon to one of his subjects, and the conditions he imposes upon him when he puts the sword in his hand. He seems to say, if not with his lips, at least by his action: "Take this weapon which belongs to me: I give it to thee as a mark of distinction, as a proof that I count upon thy bravery, thy intrepidity, thy devotedness. In honoring thee with this gift I rank thee among the men upon whose fidelity I rely. Whosoever will see thee armed in this manner will judge that thou art devoted to me, and that thou dost make use of this sword for the interests of my glory. Do not disappoint my hopes, but justify the good opinion which I have of thee and which I make known to all in giving thee this weapon; remember that it must be employed against my enemies and thine, that it should not remain in its scabbard when the time to make use of it comes. Thou shalt reap the fruit of thy combats and thy victories; I will know how to recompense thy services: the affection of thy Prince, the first rank at his court will be thy reward. But woe to thee if thou dost betray my confidence!" . . .

Thus it is that our Lord gives us the sword of His word. And woe to us if we do not enter into His designs, if we do not employ this weapon in fighting against ourselves and in conquering the enemies of the Master Whom

we serve by having in view nothing but His glory! Woe to us if we make use of this divine word only to war against Him from Whom we receive it, either by glorying in ourselves because of the gift He has made us, as though it were our personal property, or by degrading it by false interpretations! It is a weapon of war, and not an ornament of vanity.

From our first consideration upon the dignity of Him Who has made us so magnificent and so excellent a gift, we should conclude that we ought to have, together with a great esteem for this gift, a profound respect for the Giver, sentiments of lively gratitude and sincere humility.

From the second consideration upon the love and liberality with which God has made us this gift, we should conclude that we ought to receive it with confusion, confidence, love, devotedness, and generosity.

Lastly, from our third consideration, let us conclude that, to enter into the designs of God, we must receive His word with a good will in order to turn it to the profit of our Master; with courage and intrepidity to destroy whatever opposes His reign in our soul; with constant fidelity to realize the hopes which He has formed when enrolling us in His holy militia and in thus arming us. Let us recognize the honor which He has shown us and employ His word with humility for His greater glory.

III. It is now time to consider somewhat in detail when and how we should make use of so excellent a weapon, which has been given to us by so great a King, with so much love, and for ends so noble.

A sword pierces, divides and kills. The word of God pierces our heart and penetrates it to expel all that is contrary to God and to give entrance to His Spirit, so that He alone may reign therein. By thus changing the heart, the sword divides it: that is, it separates the superior part of our being from the inferior; it cuts the ties which bind us to this world; and it disperses the demons leagued against us. This sword also kills the "old man" by instilling into our soul the spirit of self-renunciation and of interior mortification. These, then, are the different uses for which we should employ it, either when we receive this divine word for our own particular needs, or when we receive it to distribute to others, according to the

mission which may have been given us for this in the position in which God has placed us. Although by our sex and our vocation we are not specially called upon to distribute this holy word, nevertheless, as there is no one who, living in the society of others, cannot and should not exercise a sort of apostolate, we also should, in certain circumstances, use the holy word for the profit of our neighbor; and this is what we should try to understand well in this Meditation.

Let the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, abound in your lips and hearts, and whatever you do, be it done in the Name of the Lord. The word of God ought always to abound in us, in order to preside over all our actions and to direct us in all things; we should, then, make the application of it in all circumstances. But that it might always abound in our lips and hearts, we should constantly nourish ourselves with it in the manner explained above. In truth, if we read, listen to, or meditate upon the word of God with respect and attention, it will pierce our heart so profoundly that it will remain there and empty it of all that is not God. If we receive it with gratitude, humility and confidence, it will communicate to us life, light and the necessary strength to detach ourselves from ourselves and from all that could be an obstacle to our union with God. If we receive and guard it with a courageous will, which relies upon God, this sword will destroy in us that degenerate nature which we call the "old man"; since it is he who maintains within us that multitude of defects and evil inclinations which cause us a continual warfare, it is, then, against him that the sword should direct its first blows, if not to kill him entirely, at least to prevent him from injuring our soul.

Let us suppose now that the word of God, having been received with the requisite dispositions, remains in our heart to regulate all its movements; this means that the spirit of Jesus, His grace, the Divine Word Himself, lives, and reigns there ready to furnish us with the aid of which we have need and which we know we shall never be able to find in ourselves. What will then take place? Our enemies will try to attack us; the devil, like a roaring lion, will go about seeking to devour us, or at least to rob us of the spiritual goods with which the grace of our Savior will have enriched us; he will act in our re-

gard as he did with Jesus in the desert: that is, he will tempt us, at one time to gluttony, (even spiritual gluttony,) at another time with sensuality and avarice, then again with presumption and vain-glory. But what will take place? Jesus, present within us, will recall to our mind His mortified and suffering life, His detachment from the goods of this world, His love for poverty and humility of heart, His annihilation, His subjection, the contempt which He endured for us; He will place before the eyes of our soul the details of His life upon which we should form ours; He will whisper to our heart some of His maxims, as strong and penetrating as a sword, which will reanimate our courage, disconcert the angel of darkness and put him to flight.

A glance back at the world will, perhaps, incline us to esteem what it seeks; or glory, or authority over others; an enviable reputation; a life of ease; conveniences in things permitted; some natural enjoyment in our intercourse with creatures; their esteem and affection . . . but if the sword of the word of God abounds in our heart, it will soon put an end to the temptation: a passage from the Holy Gospel or a text from Holy Scripture, just to the point, will present itself to our mind and this sword will cut off with a single stroke the heads of all those little foxes which come to devour the vine of the Lord. Our poor nature presents its claims: to-day for nourishment or clothing, to-morrow for repose or reliefs. If the word of God abounds in our heart, it will easily lead it back to the true religious spirit by showing us the Word Incarnate laid at His birth upon a little straw, clothed with miserable swaddling-bands, exposed to the cold of a severe winter; or Jesus retired into the desert where He prays, fasts, and watches . . . We will then ask our nature if it has more right to repose and to the conveniences of life than the human nature of our good Savior Who, on the contrary, told us that the disciple is not greater than the master. These thoughts will lead us to love what Jesus loved and to accept for His love what He so willingly embraced for love of us without being otherwise obliged to it than from the inclination of His merciful Heart.

Yes, if the word of God abounds in our lips and hearts, there is no temptation which it cannot destroy, no enemy

it cannot repel, no revolt it cannot quell, no combat from which it cannot make us come off with palms of victory, no danger from which it cannot deliver us.

To have constantly and abundantly the sword of the spirit upon our lips and in our heart is to have it, not only for ourselves, but also for others; so that we may make use of this divine word to enlighten, strengthen and aid souls according to their needs and our relations with them. In Religion, human consolations are more hurtful than salutary; but if Jesus dwells in our heart, He Who is sweetness itself and Who knows so well how to compassionate the miseries of this life, ~~He~~ will always furnish us with some word which, coming from His Divine Heart and passing through our mouth, will penetrate the heart of the afflicted person and there carry the balm of true consolation which will soothe her pain, heal her wound, give her vigor to resume the exercises which discouragement had, perhaps, made her abandon, and lead this soul to bless our Lord Who will have procured for her this unexpected aid.

Without pretending to constitute ourselves either preachers or directors, how often, in our intercourse with our Sisters, should we be able to do them good simply by a few words spoken in opportune moments! We shall always be seasonably provided with them by Him Who, after having nourished us with His word, greatly desires to dwell within us and to direct all our movements **for** His greater glory. Ah! if the divine word abounds in our lips and heart, and all that we do is *done in the Name of the Lord*, as our holy Rule directs, what an advantage it will be for us! what profit for others! what pleasure for God, Who will see His Divine Son acting in us and we acting with Him for His glory! We shall spread everywhere the good odor of Jesus Christ; and we shall make Him known and loved because we shall live His life rather than our own.

SECOND POINT.

When we have the happiness of living the life of Jesus Christ, of nourishing ourselves with His teachings and putting them in practise, (and this is what our holy Rule wishes to make us understand by these words: *Let the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, abound in your lips and hearts,*) we cannot but strengthen our-

selves in the practice of penance and mortification, and acquire this spirit in a very high degree. All that speaks of God and of His perfections enters into and bears fruit in the soul by the grace of our Lord; all that leads her to God and detaches her from created things becomes the object of her study and affection, that she might practise it in union with our Lord. She loves what Jesus loves; she wishes only what He wills; she unites herself to and transforms herself in Him by the affections of the heart and the practice of virtue; she makes use of His words and examples to repulse, cast down and destroy her enemies and correct her faults. Now, to do this efficaciously, she must renounce herself, mortify herself and put nature aside; all this necessarily contributes to establish in her a spirit of penance.

If this divine word abounds in our lips and hearts, it will give us also great facility in acquiring the spirit of prayer and union with God. With what a substantial nourishment will it not furnish us when we read books which contain it, or when we listen to sermons which explain it. What subjects does it not afford for conversing with God! What salutary considerations for advancing in the practice of virtue! . . . To nourish ourselves with the word of God, in whatever manner or under whatever form it is presented to us, is to keep ourselves in a state of continual prayer, and consequently in a state of union with God, since by prayer we correct our defects and detach ourselves from all things; and in the measure that our detachment becomes perfect our union with God is also perfected.

But let us here make a remark which is very important for the children of Carmel: it is that we must not seek in the Holy Scriptures food for the mind but for that which nourishes the heart. A study and a knowledge of the Sacred Books would become hurtful rather than salutary to us if we exceeded the limits which our vocation prescribes; instead of making the spirit of prayer easy to us, this study would only place difficulties in our way by drying up the heart, which effect is generally produced when too much food is given to the understanding. It would then be an illusion to think that to nourish ourselves with the word of God means to read much and to study as they do who, by reason of their state, ought to have a profound knowledge of the Holy Scriptures.

Again, it would be wandering from the end of our vocation to wish to understand in a very learned manner, and to be able to speak at length about God and the things of God, or pretend to dogmatize, to display great knowledge and a profound understanding of the Holy Scripture, even with the best intention in the world.

This is not what the Rule of Carmel expects of us. We have a proof of this in the little time which we have to give to reading as well as in the few books which we are permitted to have and the kind of works which are used among us: such as, the New Testament, the Imitation of Christ, Humility in Practice; with some Treatises on the Spiritual Life, the Catechism, the Lives of the Saints: and that is all . . . But is it not perfectly sufficient for us that we may learn to practise the virtues of which our Lord came to give us an example; our heart can find there abundant matter for prayer and holy affections, particularly if we join to our reading the study of the Crucifix, which is such a solid nourishment for interior souls. Yes, certainly, with this, we shall find ourselves armed with a very piercing sword with which to conquer the spirit of the world and self-love, and to strengthen within us the true spirit of prayer and union with God.

The word of God, as we have already said, ought to be for us a weapon, and not an ornament. This weapon of God should shine, it is true, but after the manner of a weapon of good steel in the hands of a brave warrior, which glitters by the movement which he makes with it when he draws it out of its scabbard to defend the interests of his Prince. No, the divine word should not abound in us for our own particular satisfaction. All its splendor consists in the humility which it imprints upon our heart and which causes to appear exteriorly in us solid virtues that contribute greatly to the glory of our Divine Master. Again, its splendor consists in the use which we make of it for the good of souls by immolating ourselves in union with Jesus for this end.

It is by putting into our hands so powerful a weapon that our Rule facilitates for us the acquisition of zeal for souls, zeal for the glory of God, and this zeal is so much the more efficacious in proportion as it is accompanied by humility, diffidence in self and confidence in God; it is a zeal especially moulded upon that of Jesus, annihilated

for the salvation of His brethren and the glory of His Father; a zeal which begins its exercise by the destruction of the "ego", making of the "old man" its first victim; a zeal which first makes us advance in the practice of poverty of spirit, obedience of the heart, perfect charity, entire self-renunciation, complete abnegation and a generous devotedness, and which draws other souls after it, either by example, by word, or by prayer; a zeal, in fine, which, by purifying and uniting us to our Divine Master, even places us in a position to obtain from Him the conversion or the advancement of a great number of souls: "Whatsoever you shall ask the Father in My Name, He will give it you." He Himself has said this.

THIRD POINT.

Examples.

The sword of the word of God pierces the heart, penetrates the innermost depths of the soul and changes it in an instant.

Let us transport ourselves in spirit into Judea in the company of our Lord. "Follow Me," says He to one; and immediately this word makes an Apostle of a publican and a sinner.

Again, this word is heard by Magdalen; and her worldly and guilty heart becomes a pure heart burning with love for God Three times does Peter deny his good Master; but the Incarnate Word already wounded with blows for the salvation of mankind, pierces his heart by one glance; and an inexhaustible source of tears announces to all the complete change wrought therein.

Let us transport ourselves upon the road to Damascus after the Ascension of our Lord, and there we see a young man, a persecutor of the infant Church: his thoughts, his sentiments, his desires, his bearing, all prove that he glories in making war upon Christ and His disciples. But a voice makes itself heard: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me" And this voice enters like a sword into the heart of Saul, piercing it, so to speak, through and through, and drawing out of it all the venom of its hatred, changes him in an instant to such a degree that he already recognizes as his Lord the One Whom he was treating as an enemy: "Lord," says he, "Who art

Thou?"—"I am," again replied the heavenly voice, "I am Jesus, Whom thou persecutest; it is hard for thee to kick against the goad!" These last words finished the conversion of Saul; and this young man, who, just now, breathed out nothing but murder and menaces against the disciples of our Lord, ranks himself at once among them; behold him henceforth an Apostle of this same Jesus; and he more than all the others will labor to glorify His Name and to gain for Him new adorers! . . .

Was not St. Augustine changed by a few lines of the word of God? His heart, pierced by this sword, renounces in that same moment what had so charmed it until then and longed henceforth to love God alone with the purest and most ardent love.

St. Francis, assisting at a sermon, felt his heart pierced by the sword of the word of God: "Sell what thou hast and give the price to the poor." These words sufficed to open his heart to grace, and that to the point of making him leave all to espouse evangelical poverty in the highest degree of perfection. He became the father of a great people poor in spirit, who are the glory and the consolation of the Church and who will glorify God during all eternity.

St. Bruno buries himself in solitude to heal the wound which his soul had received by the sword of the word of God; he there became a great contemplative and attracted to his desert a great number of souls to whom he taught the use which solitaries ought to make of the holy word. With them he meditated upon it day and night, he made use of it to combat the world, the flesh and all hell; and his children after him continue the same exercise; they draw down the mercies of God upon His Church and give to it, in great numbers, Saints who will people the heavenly Jerusalem.

What has peopled the Thebaid and other deserts? What has raised those cloister walls to separate Christian virgins from the world and to preserve them from its attractions and its dangers? What is it which has overcome tyrants and the seducers of the innocent? Is it not the sword of the word of God which has enlightened some, in showing them the nothingness of all that passes away and the price of that which is eternal; and which has given to others supernatural strength to overcome nature,

the devil and the world, notwithstanding the most horrible tortures, and to show themselves true soldiers of Jesus Christ? . . .

What respect did our holy Mother St. Teresa have for the word of God! Had this word been announced to her by the mouth of a child she would have given it all her attention, as she herself tells us. Thus she drew much light and great profit from it because of the respect and good will with which she read it, listened to it, or meditated upon it. Always obedient to this divine word, whether God Himself spoke to her in the depths of her soul, or whether she heard it through the organ of His Ministers, she did all things "in His Name" as our Holy Rule enjoins. She lived by this word because Jesus, Who was her life and her all, was continually present in her heart, and because she had recourse to Him in every circumstance to seek for light and strength according to her need.

From this came that great clearness in her views and in her plans for the work which she undertook, and that superhuman strength which made her act for the glory of God, notwithstanding the difficulties and obstacles which the demon placed in her way; from this came the constancy in the midst of the most difficult enterprises, that confidence that they would succeed, which confidence was founded upon the virtue of obedience to this holy word; from this came the numberless victories which she gained over herself in moments when the weakness and miseries of her poor nature seemed to annihilate her; from this came the defeats inflicted upon the demons and the contempt which she had for their power; from this came also that vigor, that energy which she ordinarily showed in her conduct, that indefatigable zeal, that insatiable thirst for the glory of God and the good of souls; in fine, that ardent and constant love which has opened to her that Heaven where she will shine forever as one of the most beautiful "words" of the grace of Jesus Christ. And can we forget to add that her heart was so full of the divine word that it superabounded and shed its fullness round about her, producing in souls who have followed her such admirable fruits?

We should never finish if we wished to relate in detail all that our Chronicles tell us of the marvelous ef-

fects which the word of God produced in our ancestors, of their respect, their obedience to this divine word, under whatever form and in whatever manner it was conveyed to them. Their spirit of faith showed them God in their Superiors, whose words were to them as the very words of God Himself; thus nothing stopped them when there was question of complying with their orders. They were not eager to read much nor to hear many things; but they meditated upon the little which they knew and turned it to good account. They were simple and ignorant about many things contained in the Holy Scriptures, but they were very learned in the practice of the virtues which the Incarnate Word came to teach to the world; they studied Jesus as an Infant, Jesus obedient, Jesus suffering, humbled, despised, crucified, and their only care was to render themselves conformable to Him in these different states. It was thus that they corrected their defects, repressed their passions, overcame the instincts of nature, were victorious over themselves and conquered their other enemies.

If we seek for a most perfect model of the dispositions with which we ought to receive, treasure up and profit by the word of God, let us contemplate the most holy Virgin at that moment when was operated in her virginal bosom the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Word. What humility! what respect! what submission! what obedience! and what confidence in God! . . . Let us consider her during the nine months in which she bore within her chaste womb this Divine Word and Which she afterwards preserved in her heart during her whole life: what silence, what interior recollection, that she might listen to Him and act accordingly! Never was any complaint heard to come from her lips, never any reasoning upon what was said to her. A word sufficed to find her determined to obey. Is it necessary to go to Bethlehem? Scarcely has God spoken by the voice of the Emperor when she departs, notwithstanding the rigor of the season and the delicate state in which she then was. It was the same when God spoke to her by the ministry of an Angel and commanded her to go into Egypt, or to return therefrom. In the little house of Nazareth we see her doing all things in union with the Divine Word; she listens to Him; she meditates upon all that she learns from Him,

she keeps it in her heart where are formed acts of the most sublime virtues . . . Upon Calvary the divine word no longer has for her the same sweetness as at Nazareth; it is hard and heart-rending, but this changes nothing of her respect and submission; she acquiesces equally in all things . . . Let us imitate examples so perfect.

FOURTH POINT.

Examen.

How do we receive the word of God? Is it with respect, submission and a good will to profit by it? . . . Have we not considered the qualities of the person who acted as the organ of this divine word, rather than this divine word itself? . . . Have we known how to recognize the Word of God Who spoke to us through the organ of a person who has nothing which impresses us with respect nor inspires us with confidence, either on account of her character and manner, her little knowledge and talent, or even because of her little virtue? . . . Have we understood that the word of God clothes itself with all sorts of coverings, in order at one time to try our faith and virtue, and at another to accomodate itself to our understanding?

What use have we made of this divine word for our spiritual advancement? Have we meditated upon it and applied it in a practical way to our conduct? Have we employed it to correct our defects, to repulse temptations and to strengthen ourselves in virtue? . . . Has it been for us a salutary weapon? Have we not sometimes employed it as an object of vanity by displaying, with a secret complacency, the little that we know of the things of God, instead of meditating upon it and keeping it in our heart like a precious seed which should bear its fruit in the improvement of our conduct, and the good edification of our neighbor?

Have we not shown too much eagerness and curiosity in regard to the books we read, and in our conversations

upon spiritual subjects? . . . Have we not in this way given too much to the mind and the understanding at the expense of what should be given to the heart? . . . Have we known how to draw out the essence of this divine word, that our soul might profit by this substantial nourishment? It is not nourishing our body to set a great number of meats before us without touching them; we only render ourselves sick when we swallow them all without masticating them; in fine, we may, perhaps, cause our own death by not making choice of those which are proper for us in sickness. Let us make the application. Have we not when reading the word of God spent our time in going lightly over it in order to occupy our mind with its beauties instead of making choice of that which best suited the needs of our soul; to nourish it with humility in its sickness of self-love; with obedience when sick with self-will, with charity when it has a chronic tendency to egotism; and so on with the other virtues contrary to our predominant defects?

Whence comes our little spiritual advancement, that want of amendment in our conduct, that faultiness in all our actions, that negligence in the accomplishment of our duties, that weakness which makes us succumb to the least temptation, and stumble against the first stone which hurts our foot? It comes from this, that the word of God does not abound in our hearts, (in the sense intended by our holy Rule,) either because we neglect to nourish ourselves with it by reading and meditation; or because we do so badly, not taking the time to make the application of one of these words before we seek after another; or either because we do not wish to apply it to ourselves or to profit by it; or, in fine, because we draw vanity from it.

Do all our actions accord with what the word of God teaches us? Let us compare them together and we shall, without doubt, discover that we do not always act in the name of this divine word, according to the sense implied by our holy Rule. The Divine Word has said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit! . . . Blessed are the meek! . . . Blessed are they that mourn! . . . Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice! . . . Blessed

are the merciful! . . . Blessed are the peace-makers! . . . Blessed are the clean of heart! . . . Blessed are they that suffer persecution, etc. . . .”

Are we poor in spirit when we hold to our own judgment; when we value trifles, paltry things, all that makes an outward show and which the world calls riches, talents, honors; and attach ourselves to these things?

Do we possess that meekness which springs from true humility when we are put out of humor at the least contradiction, the least word, the least thing which wounds our self-love; when those who surround us are obliged to show great regard for us and to make a thousand calculations in order to avoid giving us cause for discontent and impatience?

How can we have that holy compunction which causes to flow tears of regret, of gratitude, of love and of confidence, when our soul is dissipated, when we scarcely know how to enter within ourselves to know and hate ourselves, nor in God to know and love Him? Can we weep tears of compassion over sinners, over the physical and moral miseries of our neighbor, when we close our eyes to all this for fear of saddening ourselves; when we are preoccupied with our own interests alone, allowing ourselves to be carried away by our natural inclination to egotism?

Have we that blessed hunger and thirst after justice when we show eagerness for all that pleases us; when, instead of nourishing ourselves with the Will of God, we find it more agreeable to do our own? . . .

Are we merciful when we magnify the faults of others; when we blame them; when we judge wrongly and at random their thoughts, words and actions; when we communicate to others our judgments, true or false, and when we fear not thus to rob our neighbor of his honor and reputation, which is the greatest injustice we could commit in his regard? and is this what the word of God teaches us?

Are we peace-makers when for a nothing we are troubled ourselves and trouble others; when in return for a word which has hurt us we reply by one still more cutting? . . . Is our heart pure when we fill it with a multitude of little affections which occupy in it the

place of God; when we desire the esteem, the love and the confidence of creatures?

Do we know how to suffer to accomplish all justice, that is to say, in order never to consent to sin; to suffer to mortify our senses, our mind and our heart on occasions when we feel naturally inclined to satisfy them at the expense of our Christian or Religious duties? Do we know how to suffer to sustain the interests of our neighbor, we who, on the contrary, throw upon others all cares and burdens, and who excuse ourselves at their expense? . . . Ah, let us make a review, as exact and detailed as possible, which will enlighten us upon the abuse which we have made of the gift of God and which will make us take the resolution of doing all things, henceforth, in conformity with the divine word. Thus will this sword remain always in us for our own defense and for the service of our lawful Sovereign. Amen.

CHAPTER THIRTEENTH.

Of Manual Labor.

Text: You are to do some kind of work that the devil may find you always employed, lest by idleness he might find any inlet into your souls. You have in this both the doctrine and example of the Apostle St. Paul, by whose mouth Jesus Christ Himself spoke, who was placed by God a preacher and teacher of the Gentiles, in faith and truth, whom if you follow you cannot err. In labor and in toil, writes this holy Apostle, we worked night and day, lest we should be chargeable to any of you. Not as if we had not power, but that we might give ourselves a pattern unto you to imitate us. For also when we were with you this we declared to you, that if any man will not work, neither let him eat; for we have heard there are some among you who walk disorderly, working not at all. Now we charge them that are such, and beseech them by the Lord Jesus Christ, that working in silence they would eat their own bread. This way is good and holy; walk in it.

FIRST POINT.

You are to do some kind of work. The terms of the Rule are positive: work is obligatory for us. Even without our Rule we should be obliged thereto under many titles: first as creatures of God, then, as children of Adam, of the Church, of the Order. We need only to consider for a moment the inclination of all creatures in the natural order to see that God has required of each one of them some work proper to glorify Himself. It is useless to enter here upon a further development of this subject which would surpass the limits we must prescribe to ourselves in this Meditation. Let it suffice for us to recall briefly that work is an obligation incumbent upon us as creatures of God. This obligation has become more rigorous in consequence of sin, since we have been condemned to earn our bread in the sweat of our brow, and the earth which has now become sterile, so to speak, produces what is necessary only upon the condition of being laboriously and painfully cultivated. Thus, of whatever nature our needs may be, we cannot provide for them without a labor more or less fatiguing, even when there is question of providing for ourselves pleasures and enjoyments.

Here are already two first reasons upon which the obligation of work is founded, but upon which we shall not stop except to conclude that, having sinned, this obligation is so imperative that we can neither dispense ourselves from it, nor murmur, nor complain, however hard and painful it may be. After all, this pain cannot be compared to the pains of hell which we have deserved for one mortal sin; nor even to the pains of Purgatory to which we must submit for our less serious faults if the trials of this life, borne with the proper dispositions, do not take its place for us

But a third motive, which is yet more powerful to make us love work, is that of our title of children of the Order which, obliging us to the perfection of Christianity, makes it an imperative duty for us to imitate Christ. He is our Head, our Master, our Model; therefore the members should follow the movements of the head; disciples should practise the lessons of their masters; and copies should be conformable to their models. Now, Jesus, our Head, passed His whole life in most painful labors. From His childhood we see Him working at Nazareth under the direction of Mary and Joseph, proportioning His labor to His strength and increasing it as His strength increases; later on it is to the labors of the apostolate that we see Him devote Himself day and night, enduring fatigue, hunger, heat and cold, in order to cultivate the vineyard of His heavenly Father; later still He is engaged in the immense labors of His Passion, so painful to nature, and which He endured with so much strength and generosity to accomplish the work for which He had been sent What should not the members of such a Head do if they understand what He meant when He said that if the branch remains not united to the vine, it dies and is good for nothing except to be cast into the fire.

Listen now to the lessons of this Divine Master: The Kingdom of Heaven can be gained only by great pain and labor. It is only by laboring that we make grace fructify and merit a reward. He recognizes as His disciples only those who take their cross daily and follow Him. Every tree that beareth not good fruit shall be cut down and cast into the fire. If the Master teaches and practises such a doctrine what should the disciples, who enter His school and who pretend to walk in His foot-

steps, think or do? If the Master labors, should the disciple remain idle? If the Master labors and suffers, should the disciples, who are not above the Master, seek work that is without suffering, and think more of amusements than of labor? . . .

The Model is presented to us under all Its different aspects, with marks of laborious and painful labors upon It; here it is sweat, there it is exhaustion; and again it is blood. From whatever side I view It, I see It subjected to some laborious or painful work. Now, how can Religious souls, who should be living copies of this Model, dispense themselves from the law of labor? Should they not, on the contrary, continually subject themselves to it as did the Model which they have unceasingly before their eyes? This is why our holy Rule says expressly: *you are to do some kind of work . . .* inferring without expressing it, that we are obliged to do so under the different titles of creatures of God, of sinners, of members, disciples and copies of our Lord.

By continuing to meditate upon this point of our Rule we find several other motives which show us not only the obligation but even the necessity of work to secure our salvation. *In order that the devil may find you always employed, lest by idleness he might find any inlet into your souls . . .* In the first place, work is a means of avoiding temptations, as idleness attracts them, or rather engenders them; since St. Chrysostom tells us that it is the mother of all the vices, being the infected source whence they come forth. The idle soul begins by being tempted; then it sins and remains in its sin, having neither strength nor vigor to abandon it, being tyrannized by the passions which each fall strengthens, while the will, more and more enervated, languishes in a state of tepid inaction which multiplies its temptations and its falls. Cassian says that a Religious when occupied is tempted by only one devil, but that an idle Religious is assailed by countless numbers of them. Is not this a very pressing motive to engage us to love manual labor?

Let us here add the opinion of St. Bernard, which is so well confirmed by daily experience, and upon which we cannot meditate too often. This great Saint tells us that "idleness is the mother of foolish jesting and of railleries; the envenomed store-house of temptations and of bad or

useless thoughts; the death of the soul, and the tomb of a living man." And, in truth, is not this what idle persons are? What degradation! what a lamentable state! How can a Religious soul, without trembling for her salvation, expose herself to be buried alive in the tomb of idleness where she finds nothing but temptations which gnaw her life away?

What a dangerous illusion it is to believe that work impedes the union of the soul with God, and that sanctity consists in folding our arms to be better able to contemplate. Thus it is that Communities have been seen to fall into ruin because they worked not at all, or very little. Work is more favorable to prayer and union with God than we think, because while giving motion to the body it does the same for the soul, which thus finds itself more disposed to make its faculties operate than when it is benumbed by idleness and inaction. Without exercise all in us grows rusty.

We can mistake this state of inaction for interior silence, for peace and repose in God, but underneath, it is nothing but sloth and a want of energy; whence there results in the practice of virtue nothing but weakness, discouragement, falls, and often scandal . . .

A second motive which leads our holy Rule to impose manual labor upon us as a necessity, is our vow of poverty which obliges us to earn our livelihood by the work of our hands. Thus did St. Paul act, who is given to us as a model in the point of the Rule upon which we meditate. With the same end in view, our Holy Mother has so well established us in poverty that she does not permit us to ask for alms except in cases of extreme necessity, promising us that, if we try to please God, this good Master, in His turn, will not let us want for work, the proceeds of which ought to provide for our needs.

In this quality of being poor we should then work in order to indemnify the Order which, in receiving us, engaged itself to nourish, to clothe, and to furnish us with all that is necessary in sickness as well as in health. We should work so as not to steal, in a manner, the goods of the poor by receiving in our idleness the alms which they give us; for if persons of the world could suppose that we do not do all that we can to provide for our subsistence, they would regard us as unworthy of their benevolence and

their charity, and act towards us as they do towards idle beggars. When these latter are known as such, they give nothing to them; because they reserve it for the aid of the truly poor who are reduced to such a state as to be unable to work or to provide in a sufficient manner for their necessities.

St. Paul feared not to say that he who will not work does not deserve to eat; and though he could have with justice supported himself by the alms of those for whom he spent all his physical and moral strength, nevertheless, he worked with his hands in order not to be a burden to anyone. And what right should we have to receive the alms of those to whom we have not given perhaps, I do not say a drop of blood, but a drop of sweat; and to eat tranquilly that bread which we have not gained, and of which so many other poor are in want on our account? And it is certain that when we are preferred to other poor it is because they think that our necessity is greater than theirs, and this is why they destine for us what they would have given to them. Is it not then most just that we should be entitled to these alms by our diligence in laboring, which will shelter us from all reproach if it becomes necessary for us to have recourse, notwithstanding all our efforts, to the charity of the rich? Thus an idle and indolent soul should say to herself while eating the bread given to her, that she has no right to it, and that she nourishes herself at the expense of others more necessitous and more deserving than she.

To work then is a duty of justice, either in regard to the Order or to the charitable persons who give us their alms; for the Order, as I have already said, by engaging itself to see that nothing is wanting to us, counts upon the generous concurrence of its children in aiding to provide for the general and particular needs of the whole family. Divine Providence furnishes the necessary funds, but upon condition that the labor of its children will turn them to good account.

In the third place, we should labor so as to be in a position to accomplish the precept of almsgiving, either to succor our neighbor in his necessities, or to obtain the pardon of our sins, according to these words: "Redeem thy sins by almsgiving"; or finally, to assist our Lord in the person of His poor, that He may say to us on the last

day: "I was hungry and you gave Me to eat; naked and you clothed Me" . . . We are poor and we have nothing of our own; how then can we give alms unless it be by the fruit of our labor? This work serves to nourish and to maintain the other poor who surround us, by giving them, in their turn, the means of laboring for us and of rendering us some service; so that, in our Communities, we have the double advantage of living on alms and of giving charity to those from whom we receive it. Not one of us works for herself and yet none are in want of anything because each one benefits by the work of the others. It is in this sense that our holy Constitutions, when recommending us to work and exhorting us to give ourselves to it with a good will, adds these words: "Let each one labor for their mutual support" . . .

O precious poverty! what treasures do we not find in thee, if we love thee and are faithful to live under thy laws, like the truly poor! And, among the laws of poverty, that of manual labor is one of the most advantageous since it preserves and delivers us from all our enemies; gives us the means of providing, not only for our own subsistence, but also for the relief of our neighbor; and permits us to satisfy the precept of almsgiving, without having to fear either the care and the danger of riches, or the disadvantages of indigence and misery, since the work of others preserves us from all this. What have we lost by separating ourselves from the world, and renouncing its goods and its riches? We have lost nothing but the embarrassments and the solitudes inseparable from such things; we have only withdrawn our souls from the maledictions pronounced against the idle and slothful rich, and, in exchange, have secured for ourselves here below, the precious advantages of being content in the midst of poverty, the indescribable consolations reserved for those who do good to their neighbor for the love of God, and the recompense promised to the truly poor, and to those who relieve them and who work for God.

But to have a share in these advantages we must not be content to work in the manner in which it is commonly done; for we must sanctify our labor that it, in its turn, may sanctify us. Now, there is here, as in all things else, abuses to avoid and conditions to fulfill. The abuses are: eagerness, affection, fastidiousness, self-interested

views, little pretentions, and dissipation . . . We see persons of the world so eager and preoccupied as to forget their duties towards God; they attach themselves to what they do with a sort of passion; they seek that work which pleases them best, which suits their capacity, most flatters their self-love, favors their ambition or their avarice; and, perhaps, they do not give themselves leisure to think a moment either of their own soul or of the good God! Unhappy the Religious who works after this manner, and makes this means of salvation serve to her ruin! This would be to subvert the order established by God. Let us work, since work is for us an obligation and a necessity; but let us work like Religious, according to the spirit of our holy Rule, which is nothing else but the perfection of Christianity; let us work according to God, for God, and in God.

Our holy Rule gives us to understand with what perfection we should work by citing these words which St. Paul spoke to idle persons: *And we beseech them that are such, by our Lord Jesus Christ, that working in silence they would eat their own bread; this way is good and holy, walk in it.* To work in silence, as the Apostle intends, is to avoid the abuses which we have just pointed out, for they are altogether contrary to interior and exterior silence. That the soul may be really silent while working, it is necessary that no passion, no natural inclination should be at work within her, and for this end we must direct our work by a perfect intention and fulfill the necessary conditions. First, our work should have the sanction of obedience and be according to the spirit of the Rule; secondly, it ought to be done without prejudice to our spiritual exercises; thirdly, it ought to be done with an interior spirit.

And first, by submitting our work to obedience, self-will is subdued and reduced to silence, while when we leave it the liberty of choosing, it goes from one object to another, agitates itself, seeks what pleases it, and complains when it does not find it; in fine, it puts the soul in a state of disorder, and deprives it of the good which it should have gained by work done in silence with the sanction of obedience, in which we find so much repose of mind, peace, joy, confidence, and many other precious advantages. Obedience being truly the expression of the Will of God, a Religious soul can find no greater happi-

ness here below than by accomplishing this Divine Will; she seeks for nothing else and desires and loves nothing else. Obedience makes it known to her, and she at once embraces it with love; she accomplishes it in silence and to the best of her ability.

Let our work, then, be always conformable to obedience; let us not content ourselves with a simple permission, which we have perhaps extorted from our Superior and which we have only in appearance; there will be no silence in the soul which works by an artful obedience; we should obey *in truth* as our holy Rule so well remarks. Let us be indifferent about the work which is given to us; let us neither desire nor ask for any through motives infected by self-love; let us have no apprehension, listen to no repugnance, allow God to explain His Will to us through holy obedience, and then count upon His grace to accomplish what is commanded us, however difficult it may appear to nature and self-love. Let us remain in a state of complete indifference as regards the kind of work we are commanded to do and the manner of doing it. Obedience speaks to us on the part of God: let that suffice to keep us in peace.

Secondly, we should give ourselves to our work without prejudice to our spiritual exercises; this is why our holy Constitutions in explaining this point of the Rule, recommends that our work should not be of such a nature as to prevent us from thinking of God. If then our work ought to be such as to leave us enough liberty of mind to think of the things of God, with how much greater reason should we be free at the hours especially consecrated to prayer and to other spiritual exercises! It is then necessary to avoid too much attachment to manual labor that it may not be an obstacle to our spiritual work, to which we should give ourselves up with very great care, and for which we should also have times set apart. Let us occupy ourselves assiduously with our work, but only at the time prescribed; let us work with diligence and activity, but without that eagerness so hurtful to the soul; let us work with care to fulfill our obedience, but without self-love and attachment. Let us employ our time well, but let us know how to leave our work when the bell of obedience calls us elsewhere; let us know also how to disengage our thoughts from our work that our spiritual

exercises may not suffer in consequence. To act otherwise would not be to leave our work, but to return to it, or rather to continue it when we ought to be occupied with something else.

In the third place, our work should be done with an interior spirit; this is what we call *working in silence*. This is also what our holy Constitutions wish of us when they enjoin the remembrance of the presence of God during our work. We should then offer our work to God when we begin it, and renew this offering from time to time when we perceive that our mind wanders elsewhere. We should often purify our intention that we may have nothing else in view but the glory of God and the accomplishment of His holy Will. We should unite our work with that of our Lord to render it more meritorious and give more glory to His heavenly Father.

Lastly, we should as far as possible, spiritualize our work by making moral applications which usefully occupy the mind and heart while the body acts exteriorly. An interior soul will find a thousand ways of sanctifying herself in the most material and ordinary works. If obedience sends her to pull up weeds in the garden, she will at the same time beg our Lord to destroy the defects which prevent virtues from growing in her heart; the thorns which prick her hands will cause her to remember the nails which pierced those of our Lord, and the thorns which pierced His sacred Head. Another Sister who is not an interior soul, may do the same work, but she will not draw the same profit from it. Being obliged to pull the weeds, she will think perhaps that obedience could very well have chosen for her another occupation, and that it will be difficult after such work for her to do something of a more delicate nature; she will find it very painful and wearisome; she will be very glad to be freed from it; and she will hurry through it as fast as she can in order to get rid of it as soon as possible. Poor Sister! I pity you: you give yourself much trouble without gaining any profit by it! . . .

Another will tell me that a work is very much to her taste, because it seems to her that she succeeds well in it, that she does it with pleasure; that she is glad when it is given to her; she will think that she does it quickly, etc., etc. "Alas! my good Sister," I will say to her after the

example of St. Dorotheus to his disciple, "this work is, indeed, very agreeable and you succeed well in it; but it contributes nothing towards your perfection on account of the complacency you take in it and the little interior spirit with which you perform it. Rather humble yourself because you are too weak to be employed in more painful labors by which you could give more glory to God. Or, ask our Lord to work in your soul with as much facility and satisfaction as you take in that which you do; try to occupy your mind and your heart with something that will aid you to advance in perfection. Do not forget that your vocation obliges you to tend constantly to God by union, and that it is necessary for you to renounce your tastes, your inclinations, nature, self-love, your own will and desires. Do not forget that labor is only the means and not the end; that it ought to aid you to seek God and to find Him, and not to seek yourself and your own satisfaction"

SECOND POINT.

Manual labor is most proper to make us acquire the spirit of penance and mortification, particularly when it is done according to the spirit of the Rule, and with the conditions required. From what we have just seen in the preceding Meditation, we cannot doubt the efficacy of this means, and that it furnishes us with occasions for making satisfaction to God for our sins and of keeping ourselves in a continual state of penance, mortification and renunciation.

First the obligation to work which we have as creatures of God, places us in a state of dependance, contradicts our will, and consequently keeps us in a state of mortification and renunciation. The obligation which we have to labor as children of Adam, subjects us to the greatest trouble, since we must submit to it as a penance expressly imposed for sin. Adam, in a state of innocence, had worked as a creature of God, but without sweat and without fatigue; he sinned, and the Lord signified to him that he should suffer while laboring, that the earth would produce its fruit only on condition that he watered it with his sweat We, too, have sinned; and work, being our penance and reminding us continually of what

we have been and what we are, maintains within us the spirit of penance and of mortification.

As children of the Church and of our holy Order, we are members of a Head Who has labored painfully to satisfy the justice of God for sin; we are disciples of a Master Who, by His lessons and His example, teaches us in what the true spirit of Christianity consists: which is penance; and we ought to be His imitators, His living copies. What more proper than labor to establish in us the spirit of penance and renunciation?

If we consider labor as necessary to drive away temptations, to furnish ourselves with food, to supply our own needs and those of others, and to accomplish the precept of almsgiving, do we not find in this exercise much which causes nature to suffer and accustoms it to remain in a continual state of mortification?

Then passing on to the conditions required for our work that it may be according to God, we cannot but find in its practice an excellent nourishment for the spirit of penance; for work, submitted in all things to obedience, is the death of self-will, throws nature into an agony and leaves, so to speak, no intrenchments for self-love. To do always what others wish and never what we wish ourselves: what a means for doing penance and accustoming ourselves to mortification! . . . Work restricted to certain hours that it may do no harm to our spiritual exercises, when we feel inclined to attach ourselves to it and wish to finish it, when we do it with pleasure and eagerness, assuredly furnishes us with the opportunity of making many acts of mortification and renunciation. It is the same of the application we must sustain to occupy ourselves interiorly and to supernaturalize material labor. What a difference there is between a person who works only at what she wishes, when she wishes and as she wishes, and the one who works as our holy Rule intends! On one side it is a pleasure; on the other, it is penance, mortification, self-renunciation.

According to the remark which previously we had occasion to make, every point of our Rule, the perfect accomplishment of which detaches us from ourselves and from creatures, purifies us from our faults and nourishes the spirit of penance, ought necessarily to facilitate for us the acquisition of the spirit of prayer and union with God, an increase within us zeal for the glory of our Divine

Master and for the salvation of souls. Experience proves that a soul who subjects herself to manual labor with an interior spirit and who observes perfectly the required conditions, finds in its numberless occasions of suffering for God in silence and unknown to creatures; it also proves that in this meritorious exercise she unites herself, by prayer, to Him Who alone witnesses her trials, Who gives her in abundance the graces necessary to profit by them, and Who afterwards repays her for them; finally, it proves that this soul finds in her labor, when united to that of our Lord, much whereby to merit, not only for herself, but also for others. How many poor sinners owe the grace of their conversion to some Religious soul who, in the silence of retreat, applies herself to work in a spirit of penance, and in union with our Lord! An idle soul on the contrary, who seeks union with God in repose, and who nourishes herself only with delights and sensible consolations will do nothing at all for the glory of God and the good of souls. May it not be so with us! . . .

THIRD POINT.

Examples.

That idleness is the mother of all vices is a truth which the experience of all ages evidently proves. If David had been occupied at some work he would not have prepared for himself regrets and tears for the rest of his life on account of the two faults which came from his idleness. Solomon would not have lost at one and the same time the precious treasure of his wisdom, his innocence and his friendship with God, if he had not lost his time with the ladies of his Court. How many Davids, how many Solomons there are, who owe to idleness the misfortune of having offended God! . . . Again, did not this vice occasion the ruin of Sampson!

But without going back to find examples in ages so remote, can we not find thousands of them in times nearer our own, where we see multitudes of Saints who gave themselves up to manual labor in order to do penance, to avoid temptation and to preserve themselves from sin; while at the same time they provided for their own support and for that of the poor . . .

In the Thebaid, there were Monasteries where they applied themselves so carefully to manual labor that the profit they drew from it sufficed to feed all the poor within their neighborhood and even those of distant countries. The ancient Solitaries labored much, even if only to preserve themselves from the dangers of idleness; for it often happened that when they could not sell their work they undid it and began it again that they might always be occupied. St. Jerome says that in the Monasteries of Egypt, no one was received who would not work. This is what a contemporary author relates of a Monastery in Pavia, where there were three hundred Religious: "These men," he says, "labor much and diversely. They rise very early in the morning; each one in his turn does the cooking and prepares the tables for the repast, with bread, wild herbs, other things dressed, olives and cheese. As to manual labor, some cultivate the land and take care of the garden; others make the bread; some work at the mill, others at the forge; some are occupied in making cloth, currying the leather and making shoes; others again copy manuscripts, or plat mats, baskets, etc."

In the time of St. Bernard we are told that in the Monastery of Clairvaux, which counted a great number of Religious, not a single one was allowed to remain idle, and when they worked together it was with such silence that strangers could hear absolutely nothing but the noise of the tools which they used. The same is related of the Monasteries of La Trappe, by those who go there to be edified.

Who does not know the story of that Religious who, visiting the Abbot Sylvanus upon Mt. Sinai, was astonished to see the Religious working, saying that the part of Magdalen was the better part, and that it was not worth their while to give themselves so much trouble for the food that perishes. The Abbot Sylvanus having heard this ordered that they should put the Religious in a cell, and give him only a book with which to entertain himself, without taking him anything to eat. The hour of the repast arrived, and the Religious waited, in vain, to be conducted to the Refectory. He at last decided to go out of his cell to learn from the Abbot the cause of this forgetfulness: "My brother," the Abbot said to him, "you are a contemplative, you have no need of nourishment: but

those who labor have taken their refection at the usual hour."

Those holy Religious who worked with so much assiduity, worked also with an interior spirit, so that they are compared to bees who produce, at one and the same time, wax and honey. While applying themselves to manual labor they never forgot to meditate upon some verses of the psalms, or passages of the Holy Scripture. "Those who work with their hands," say St. Augustine, "can easily chant spiritual canticles after the example of workmen and artisans who, while doing their work, never leave off conversing together and disputing."

And to come to examples nearer home, and which are more capable of making an impression upon our minds, let us see how our holy Mother St. Teresa thought and acted in regard to this subject. If contemplation alone had been a perfect way, who more than our seraphic Mother would have put aside all labor in order to give herself up to this holy exercise? And yet we read in her works that she regretted all the turns she could have made with her spindle during that time which, through obedience, she employed in writing what God had made known to her concerning the interior life. This motive of obedience alone could console her for the pain she felt at not finding some time for manual labor. She never omitted to take her work to the parlor when she was called there; and her maxim was: that poor women should have as great a scruple for not working as for robbing someone of what he had justly acquired.

We learn from the Chronicles of our holy Order that our holy Mother was so poor in spirit, so humble of heart and in her actions, that we need not be surprised if she desired to gain her living like the poor by the labor of her hands. To provide for the necessities of her Monastery she chose the poorest and most common work, such as that done with the distaff, the spindle and the needle. These manual employments were the precious heritage which her daughters cultivated without noise; they were for the Convent, more than poultry yards and farms, and not subject, as they are, to sterility and the misfortunes of the world; they were the rents which freed them from all disputes and all lawsuits . . . By this means, so much recommended by the ancient Fathers, she exercised the body, humbled the mind, occupied the hands, pre-

vented idleness, banished thoughts of ambition and exterminated vanity from this earthly paradise which she cultivated more faithfully than Adam, and from which she drew unparalleled delights.

O Woman truly strong! whose fingers handled the spindle as though they were too unskilful to hold the pen, and who gave themselves up to the labor of the pen as though they had never touched the spindle! Let us confess with admiration that it was for having so well guided the spindle that they succeeded so perfectly in directing the pen: and that the Divine wisdom which shines in the writings of our holy Mother is the recompense of the humble work which she did with her hands. She spun and she wrote at one and the same time; because in spinning she engraved with her spindle, as with a pen, in the hearts of her daughters humility, poverty, and a love for humble manual labor.

The lives of our ancient Mothers teach us that they had inherited our holy Mother St. Teresa's love for work, and that, while they gave themselves up to it, they also exercised their daughters in it. It is related of Mother Anne of Jesus, Foundress of the Order in France, that when at recreation any one of the Sisters stopped her work in order to speak, she would reprove her for it saying: "Come, now, my daughter, can we not speak and work at the same time? . . ."

Madame Louise of France was never idle; she worked or prayed continually. Being in the parlor one day, her visitor, hearing from behind the grate the noise of something which rolled upon the floor, had the curiosity to ask what it was. Madame Louise replied that she was chaining a chaplet, and that she had let some of the beads fall; which caused this person to be greatly edified at seeing a Princess of France thus occupied for the love of God.

Our holy Mother St. Teresa wished also that in the Visitation of her Monasteries, the Visitor should be informed and take note of the work done, in order that he might encourage the Sisters and excite them to give themselves to it according to the spirit of the Rule.

Our holy Father St. John of the Cross and Fr. Anthony of Jesus when they began to establish the Reform, gave an example of great diligence in manual labor; thus,

at one time, we see them aiding the masons, at another, sweeping, and again, doing other kind of work.

In the first point of this Meditation we have seen our Lord, our Model by excellence, occupied from His childhood in manual labor, poor and painful labor; and it is to this kind that we should especially give ourselves. Our holy Mother, in our holy Constitutions, forbids curious works, or works done in gold and silver, and we are not permitted to do them except when these things are to serve for the adornment of the Altar.

FOURTH POINT.

Examen.

How have we acquitted ourselves of our obligation to labor? Have we not lost our time in trifles? Have we not remained idle under pretext of weariness, weakness or indisposition?

Have we gone quickly from one work to another, employing every minute of our time? Because the sum of all these little moments, which we lose without attaching any importance to it, could produce, nevertheless, a certain amount of work, when we know how to turn them to account. We see persons who have many affairs to attend to, going and coming all day long, and yet who do a great deal of manual labor, because they have the wise practice of economizing their time: if they have a moment, we see them immediately take their work in hand; everywhere they go they take some work with them, in order that they might profit by every spare moment. Is this what we have done? . . .

Are we not, on the contrary, of the number of those who always need something; who, in looking for what they need, lose that precious money or time, and who only set to work when the hour is come to put it aside? To work much and to profit well by our time it is necessary to keep all that we have need of in good order so that being able to find everything easily we may at once set to work. Alas! how much time is lost by a want of order and foresight! How many times have we not made several trips when one alone would have sufficed to procure all that was necessary for our work!

Have we understood well the necessity of work to banish temptation, and to close the door of our soul against the enemy? How many times have we not al-

lowed ourselves to remain idle, with our head in our hands and our arms crossed, at a moment when being strongly tempted, we should, on the contrary, have done as did St. Paul who, when he was exhausted, wore himself out still more; or like that holy Solitary who on such occasions would say: "I wear out the one who wears me out!"

Have we loved to work in order to aid the Order, our good Mother, in providing for the necessities of her children? Have we understood that being nourished and maintained by the labor of others it is a duty of reciprocal justice to do all in our power to support and maintain them in return? Are we convinced that it is stealing the goods of the poor, and deceiving those who give us alms, when we do not work and yet want for nothing in Religion? Have we appreciated the happiness of working either to be able to give alms, or to contribute to the adornment of the Altar?

Has our work always had the sanction of obedience? Have we not chosen this kind rather than that, under the pretext that it was more lucrative, more advantageous to the common good, or more pressing; when all the while it was because it suited us best? . . . Have we not manifested a repugnance for such and such work, and eagerness for such another? . . . Have we not murmured because we were overburdened with work, or because our attractions were not consulted? Have we not envied the work of others, believing that we had for it more skill, more dexterity?

Have we not shown some attachment to our manner of doing things and to our personal views, in regard to the direction or the execution of our work? Have we not employed in it all or a part of the time destined for our spiritual exercises? Have we known how to arrange our affairs and our time so as to be free at the time of Community Acts? Are we always faithful to leave a letter half formed, or a stitch unfinished, when the bell calls us to the Examen, to Prayer, to Mass, etc? When we ceased to work, did we, at the same time, cease to think of our work? Have we not been preoccupied with what we have left, with what we have yet to do, the means which we shall employ to finish it, or the little contradictions or satisfactions which our work gives us; in fine, with a thousand other thoughts capable of distracting us

at prayer and making us lose the fruit of it? . . .

Have we not abridged our Prayer or our Examen to give ourselves up sooner to our work? Or, by a contrary defect, have we not employed in these holy exercises the time, or a part of the time, destined for work?

Have we shown repugnance for certain duties or labors which we imagined would prevent our practices of devotion? And, with the thought that we could not advance in the spiritual life by occupying ourselves in these offices or this work, have we not been negligent in regard to our spiritual exercises, saying that we should return to them in earnest when our occupation or our office should be changed? This is a very dangerous illusion which comes from a want of the spirit of faith and of confidence in God. If we saw the Will of God in obedience, could we think that He gives us an employment which is injurious to us? On the contrary, should we not think that if He has given us this employment it is because it will be very profitable to us, that He wishes to recompense, by special graces, the sacrifices which it imposes upon us; that He wishes to prove our fidelity, and to see how we shall turn to account every moment so as to give all the time in our power to our spiritual exercises, when an extra amount of work obliges us to omit or to abridge them? This is what the spirit of faith knows how to find out; and then confidence makes us expect that God will supply what is wanting to our actions when, after having done all that we were able to do, we have been obliged to leave them unfinished in order to accomplish what obedience required of us.

Our holy Mother St. Teresa assures us that she who advances most and who makes the best prayer is not the one who has the most time to employ therein, nor the most facility in applying herself to it, but she who, not having a moment to recollect herself, nevertheless accomplishes the Will of God, by occupying herself for love of Him with what obedience prescribes. But, as it is easy for us to fall into extremes, let us examine whether it is always obedience which occupies us at the time of our spiritual exercises, and if we ourselves have not too lightly asked for dispensations, allowing ourselves to be carried away by our eagerness for work, or deceived by the fear of wanting time for it, and of displeasing those who have given us the work to do, etc.

Have we offered our work to God? Have we done it with an interior spirit, and with purity of intention? Have we not taken vain complacency in it, being very glad that others paid attention to it, that they considered it well done, that they remarked our ability, our diligence and skill? Have we not been flattered by praises and offended by remonstrances? Have we not been very glad to be preferred to such and such a Sister on account of some work which was fine or flattering to our self-love; and jealous when others have been preferred to ourselves? . .

Have we united our labor to that of our Divine Master? Have we done it in a spirit of penance? Have we seized for the love of God, all the occasions of mortification, self-renunciation and privation which we met with in our work. Has our mind been piously occupied during work, as our holy Rule directs, and as the divine Mary and our amiable Savior occupied theirs? By what practical application from the Holy Scripture have we supernaturalized our work? Are we of the number of those truly interior souls who know how to occupy all their moral faculties usefully while the members of their body are in action, and who do nothing but what relates to the glory of God, the good of souls and their own spiritual advancement? Alas! how many graces lost by our dissipation during work, by our eagerness, by our want of interior application, and by our little love for God! How many exterior acts entirely void of merit for our souls and for the glory of the Divine Master! How many times have not these acts hindered instead of advancing us in the way of perfection because we have directed them to the profit of our self-love, seeking ourselves or the approbation of others!

Ah! if we had worked in a spirit of penance, in union with our good Master, with purity of intention and a disengagement of heart, our work would have been meritorious for ourselves, agreeable to God, and useful to our neighbor. And since this Meditation has made us understand the obligation, the necessity and the means of sanctifying manual labor, let us take, in the presence of God, a firm resolution to correct all the defects we have just remarked; let us work henceforth in such a manner as to glorify God by accomplishing this duty of manual labor according to the spirit of our holy Rule.

CHAPTER FOURTEENTH.

Of Silence.

Text: The Apostle commends silence when he enjoins us to observe it. And, as the Prophet testifies, silence is the ornament of justice. And again: In silence and hope shall your strength be. Hence we ordain that you observe silence from the end of Complin until the end of Prime, the following day. At other times, although you are not obliged to observe silence so rigorously, yet great care should be taken not to talk too much; for, as it is written and experiences teaches, in the multitude of words sin shall not be wanting, but he that hath no guard on his speech shall meet with evils. Again, he that useth many words shall hurt his own soul; and our Lord says in the Gospel, that for every idle word that men shall speak they shall render an account on the day of judgment. Therefore, let every one make a balance for his words and a just bridle for his mouth, lest he should slip by his tongue and fall, and his fall be incurable unto death. Let him, with the Prophet, take heed unto his ways that he sin not with his tongue, and let him endeavor very diligently to observe silence, wherein consists the ornament of justice.

FIRST POINT.

Since first we began to meditate upon our holy Rule we have not found in any other Chapter expressions so strong and so energetic, and which show us so clearly the importance which we ought to attach to their faithful observance. Whence we must infer that silence is one of the most essential and obligatory points of our holy Rule, and, consequently, one upon which we should dwell in a special manner in order to understand well its meaning and its practice . . .

Silence is at once the support and the strength, the clothing and the ornament of our Order; without it there can be in it no perfection. Now, as perfection is the aim of a Religious soul, she must either renounce all hopes of attaining it, or submit to the law of silence; and the more perfectly she observes it, the sooner shall she attain her end. Our holy Order, more than all others, has need of a rigorous silence because its special purpose is union with

God, which we can reach only by prayer. On the other hand, no one can be ignorant of the fact that the spirit of prayer cannot exist without recollection, which is nourished by silence; hence it follows that silence is the first step of the ladder of perfection, the key which opens to us its door; the necessary foundation upon which depends the elevation, the solidity and the beauty of the whole edifice. Thus without silence there is no recollection . . . no prayer . . . no union with God . . . no perfection . . . no true child of Carmel.

Let us, then, recognize that this virtue is obligatory and fundamental; let us esteem, let us appreciate, let us love this only means by which we can enter upon the way which leads us to the end which God proposed to Himself in calling us to Carmel. Let us give ourselves up in a particular manner and with all our strength to the practice of this virtue which leads to the perfection of our vocation.

By silence, 1st, we preserve our soul from sin; 2nd, we enrich it with virtue, we adorn and strengthen it with the grace of God; 3rd, we enlighten it with pure and vivid lights; 4th, we unite it to God.

1st.—The passage from Holy Scripture cited by our holy Rule proves to us with evidence that too much talking engenders many evils, sullies the soul and places us in the way of perdition: "For, as it is written, and as experience teaches, in the multitude of words sin shall not be wanting . . ." Who among us has not learnt this truth by her own experience? But, what do I say? Ah! if we knew all the faults which come from our infractions of the rule of silence, the evil which we do to our own soul, the wrong which we do to others and to the Order, we should most certainly watch more over our tongue; for there is no one who, knowing the deluge of evils which the tongue can cause, would have malice enough, or rather, who would be insane enough, to be willing to cause so much evil! This is why if ignorance regarding sins of the tongue would disappear, silence would assuredly be well kept.

Let us listen to what St. Bernard says of himself, and we shall then see what we ought to think and say to ourselves: "When," says he, "on account of some necessity I have obtained permission to speak, I at once make use

of many words. I have not only said what was necessary, but also things which were not necessary, which do not concern me, and to which I ought not to have extended my permission. I have sought with eagerness the conversation of men; and, discoursing with them I have entertained them with things which could not edify, but rather scandalize them. My words have not been conformable to my state, I have acted according to my natural inclinations. I have spoken vain, ridiculous, idle and useless words; by satisfying my desire to speak and studying how to slander, I have profaned my mouth by lying and detraction. My tongue, which so easily slips, never relates things in the manner in which they have been said or done; it takes one thing for another; it mingles together so many superfluous and extravagant words, either to praise or to blame others, that I may say, in truth, that I lie almost every time I speak”

Let us remark that St. Bernard confesses here only the faults which he himself had personally committed, and committed at a time when he had permission to speak about necessary things. What then can be said of us when we speak without permission, at forbidden hours, in forbidden places, and about things which are not necessary? Again, let us remark that if, like St. Bernard, even while taking necessary precautions we mingle in our discourses useless things, slanders, railleries which wound charity, lies, flatteries, words of vanity, impatience, murmuring, complaint, etc., what will it be when we allow our tongue to speak without precaution and reflection? What disorders must follow! . . . Finally, let us remark that if in watching over our words we discover so many faults which escape from human frailty, of how many others do we not render ourselves guilty without recognizing them, without repenting of them, without repairing or correcting them? . . . We have, then, good reasons for saying that the observance of silence preserves us from a multitude of sins!

2nd.—But let us say also, and with as much reason, that silence enriches our soul with merits and adorns it with virtues. The merit of a soul consists in renouncing itself to accomplish the Will of God and to procure His glory; this is the work of virtue. To observe the law of silence perfectly it is necessary to do violence to our-

selves, to renounce ourselves continually; and this exercise produces the virtues of patience, humility, meekness, charity, and a multitude of others which follow in its train. Now, besides this, a soul who is careful to restrain her tongue watches at the same time over her thoughts; she does not dwell upon any which could give birth to the imperfect affections from which easily flow words for which she will afterwards have to repent. This exercise purifies and embellishes the heart into which none but good thoughts and holy affections enter; and thus are verified the words of the Prophet cited in our holy Rule: *Silence is the ornament of justice*. By the sole fact that she observes religious silence the just soul is adorned with a divine reflection which disposes her to receive the impression of all the virtues: a brilliant adornment which renders her pleasing in the eyes of God.

A soul who is silent acts in the same manner as God, Who does all things in silence and Who operates His greatest marvels gently and sweetly. This soul also practises in silence the most sublime virtues; she sees, she knows what she ought to do to please God; the time, the means, the manner of doing it perfectly; exterior noise cannot turn her from it. In this silence she perceives all the movements of her soul, pronounces judgment against what she finds imperfect, discovers the movements of natural instinct, hears the least cries of nature, the least disturbance of the passions, and finds the means of remedying all this by prayer, mortification and self-renunciation. A silent soul realizes in herself what St. Bernard says of the exercise of silence: "It is the mother, the nurse, the guardian of all the virtues." Happy the soul who knows how advantageous it is to keep silence which engenders, nourishes and guards within her those virtues which ought to ornament and adorn her, thus to render her agreeable to her Divine Master!

3rd.—Silence enlightens and strengthens the soul. It is again our holy Rule which teaches us this by these words of the Prophet: *In silence and hope shall your strength be*. It is not difficult to understand this. Since silence makes us avoid sin and enriches us with all virtues, it is not to be doubted that we ought also to have more light to know our enemies and more strength to combat them. What is it that blinds the soul? It is sin; cause

this to disappear by means of silence, and you will see the light. What is it that strengthens the soul? It is grace and the practice of virtue; let silence attract them and establish them within us, and the soul will at once become strengthened.

But let us here consult our own heart. Is it not true that when I feel moved by some passion and speak at that moment I show my weakness and fall into serious faults? On the contrary, if I keep silence while the emotion lasts, I end by recognizing the cause of it, I fight against it and destroy its effects; then, instead of committing faults I practise virtue: I humble myself, I renounce myself, I condemn myself, I interpret well what before had appeared wrong, and I resist all the evil inclinations which would draw me after them. Lastly, I do not repent for having followed the counsel of St. Francis de Sales who forbids all use of the tongue while the heart is agitated . .

4th.—In the last place, the practice of silence unites us to our Lord; and this is the teaching of all the Masters of the spiritual life. St. Jerome says: "The Fathers of the desert were very faithful to the observance of holy silence, because they regarded it as the means of their being raised to the contemplative life." St. John Climacus taught the same, for he says that silence makes us advance in perfection and leads us secretly to God; and in the same way that it makes us draw near to the Divinity, it also causes the Divinity to draw near to us and to enlighten us with Its pure light.

But that this may be the case there should be both interior and exterior silence. God is not in the midst of noise nor of tumult; but let there be profound silence and the Lord will appear and act as Sovereign Master. O precious silence which purifies the soul, enriches it with merit, adorns it with grace and virtue, enlightens it with the most vivid lights which strengthen it against its enemies, elevates it above all creatures and above itself, and unites it intimately to God: first, by the understanding and the will which will act only in union with the Divine Will; and afterwards, by a marvellous transformation which sometimes commences in this life and is finished and perfected in a blessed eternity! . . Oh, let us then love, let us practise as perfectly as possible this

blessed silence, in order to have a share in the precious advantages which it procures!

But it is not sufficient to contemplate the beauties of an object; if we wish to enjoy it we must, above all, appropriate it to ourselves. To understand the advantages and the excellence of silence is to contemplate an object which does not belong to us; but to practise it is to render ourselves possessors of it. Let us, then, see what we must do to acquire so many advantages and so much happiness.

Silence is of two kinds which are distinct but inseparable: to be perfect it must be both interior and exterior. Without exterior silence we cannot perfectly guard the interior; and without interior silence the exterior is always imperfect; we must, then, join both together in practice.

Again, I distinguish two kinds of exterior silence: silence of the tongue and silence in action.

Silence of the tongue is very rigorous in our holy Order; we see in our holy Rule and in our holy Constitutions that it ought to be kept inviolably from Complin until after Prime on the following day; and although we are not obliged to keep it so rigorously at other times: *Great care should be taken not to talk too much.* So that the permission which is given us to speak a few words extends only to necessary things; again we must not, when two words will suffice, make use of three . . . In order to reduce the number of words signs have been established among us so that we might make ourselves understood without words. Besides, great precaution is recommended when necessity constrains us to speak. Thus, it ought not to be in a passage-way, in a place of rule, nor in a loud voice; but we ought to go apart in some solitary place, close the door before speaking, speak low and in such a manner as to be heard only by the one whom we address. If there happens to escape from us more words than are necessary, regular observance enjoins that we should prostrate upon the spot, even in the very place where the fault is committed.

Does not all this prove that silence of the tongue ought to be strictly practised among us, and with what vigilance we should watch over ourselves? Let us listen to our holy Rule; let us see the importance which it attaches to this

practice and the terrible menaces with which the Holy Scripture threatens us if we are not faithful. After having told us that *in the multitude of words sin shall not be wanting*, that *he who useth many words shall hurt his own soul*; after having reminded us that *on the day of judgment we shall render an account for every idle word*, it adds: *Let each one make a balance for his words and a just bridle for his mouth, lest he should slip by his tongue and fall, and his fall be incurable unto death.* What could be more forcible or more persuasive to make us determine to observe the law of silence, than to declare that its violation can cause our eternal ruin? . . .

And since our Rule is so precise upon this point, since it enters into so many details to teach it to us and to make its practice easy, does it not behoove us to take all kind of precautions and to make use of every means to practise a virtue so essential? Should we not be very culpable by rendering, through our own negligence, *our fall incurable*? Let us then watch over our tongue, as our holy Rule recommends: *Let each one take heed unto his ways that he sin not with his tongue, and let him endeavor very diligently to observe silence wherein consists the ornament of justice.*

Hence it follows that our eternal lot depends upon the manner in which we shall have governed our tongue, upon the many or few words we shall have spoken, and the more or less vigilance and care we shall have shown in observing this law of silence. Can we then regard this matter with cold indifference? Can we meditate seriously upon this point of our Rule without taking a firm resolution to watch over our tongue, to retrench all vain and useless words, to weigh them, and to put a bridle upon our mouth as soon as we see we are going to exceed the limits prescribed? Why not exercise ourselves in becoming mute, and in making ourselves understood by signs? Why not scrupulously observe the regulations which our holy Founders have judged necessary in order to enable us to attain to the perfection and the habit of silence? . . . And this perfect practice consists, as we have just seen, in not speaking a word during Strict Silence without evident necessity. In order to do this we should foresee all that we might have to say at that time so as to say it previously; again, we must examine if the

words which then appear necessary are really so, in order to delay them as long as possible, or to replace them by signs, taking care to avoid useless signs which lead to dissipation and a loss of time.

Out of Strict Silence, we have seen to what our Rule obliges us for the perfect practice of this virtue. We must, then, watch over, take precautions, calculate and weigh all our words so as not to pronounce one except through necessity, with permission, at an opportune time, in a suitable place, in a low and modest tone of voice, and in a gentle and humble manner. After having spoken we should examine if all these conditions have been observed, repair as soon as possible and to the best of our power the faults committed, by accusing ourselves of them and asking for a penance, either privately or in public. Before speaking we should ask ourselves: What am I going to say? . . . How should I say it? . . . To whom should I say it? . . . Where should I say it? . . . When should I say it? . . . Is it really necessary to say it? . . . And then act according to the reply of our conscience.

But silence in words does not suffice for the perfection of exterior silence: to this must be joined silence in action. We should observe it in all our movements, making the least possible noise. Thus our Rule of silence forbids us to go to and fro during Strict Silence, and also to work at anything which makes the least noise; at this time the Monastery ought to be like a desert, and this to such a point that one may not hear even the rattling of a sheet of paper. During the rest of the time we should also use great precaution not to make a noise, either by walking or coughing, opening and closing the doors and windows, etc. Our ancient Mothers used to say that a Carmelite ought to be seen before being heard; thus alparagates which do not make any noise have been given to us, and they forbid us to drag our feet after us so as to be heard when walking. To close the doors quietly, to open them cautiously by raising the latch gently, to close the window-shutters to prevent them from slamming, are also precautions prescribed for the observance of exterior silence.

After having considered in the silence of words and actions the first kind of silence, which is at once the intro-

duction to and the guardian of the second, let us try to understand this last well; let us see in what interior silence consists, for without it we cannot attain to the perfection of that silence required by our holy Rule.

As exterior silence regulates the movements of the tongue and of the body, so interior silence regulates those of the soul and represses all that could cause disturbance within it. Never to speak and never to move would evidently be to understand the law of exterior silence badly and to observe it wrongly; so too would it be to understand badly the law of interior silence to wish to forbid all action to the faculties of the soul and to seek to unite ourselves to God without labor, to serve Him and praise Him without the tongue of the heart. As there are hours and moments during which the tongue remains mute, so there may also be for the soul hours of complete silence during which all action on the part of its faculties is suspended. But this is very rare, and it is not in our power to attain to it by our own industry; we should not even desire nor seek it, because God alone then works in the soul independently of herself and her own activity. We shall not here occupy ourselves with this kind of silence since in this state there is nothing to be done except to humble ourselves much if God deigns to raise us to it, as He does in the case of certain souls, and to profit by the graces of this supernatural operation.

The practice of interior and ordinary silence consists in repressing the disorderly movements of the soul, stifling the cries of nature and silencing the voice of the passions which diversely agitate us. Again, it consists in regulating the operations of the faculties of the soul, that is to say, in calling back the imagination when it wanders; in examining our thoughts in order to admit only those which are good and useful; in exercising our understanding only upon matters capable of procuring glory to God and good to souls; in not consulting our memory except for the purpose of finding in it edifying recollections profitable to salvation; in allowing our heart only those affections which are laudible and holy; in a word, to regulate our whole interior in such a manner that it may return, in some sort, to the primitive state of creation.

Let us represent to ourselves the interior silence of man upon coming forth from the mind and the hands of

his Creator, placed alone in this vast universe in sight of the marvels of heaven and earth which praised the Lord, in the presence of Him Who had just given Him being and of whom he knew that he was the image and likeness. Can we doubt that all within him was occupied in contemplating, admiring, praising and loving the Creator and Supreme Lord of all things? . . . Within him there must have reigned perfect silence, that is to say, no voice of passion, of nature, of self-love, could have made itself heard, and there was no language used but that of admiration, praise and love.

Thus, to observe silence perfectly, we should still all interior voices which make themselves heard with trouble, worry, agitation, disquietude, etc.; all voices which satisfy self, flatter self-love, lead to natural pleasures, every voice which occupies the soul with frivolous amusements and useless things, every voice of complaint, of murmuring, of disobedience, of egotism, of pride, etc.; for all these voices are contrary to interior silence. On the other hand, to remember God, to meditate upon His law, to ask for His grace and for all that may be pleasing to Him, and draw down His mercy upon the earth, is to observe interior silence, provided that all is done in the peace of God, without eagerness and with great detachment. To watch over ourselves, to leave ourselves entirely in the hands of God, to humble ourselves, to immolate and annihilate ourselves for His glory alone without any return upon self, is also to observe interior silence. In a word, all interior labor done in the peace of God, under the influence of His grace, the result of which ought to be to annihilate self and to cause God alone to live in us, may be considered as a practice of this interior silence by which the soul raises itself above itself and becomes united to God.

Take heed unto your ways, as the Prophet says, lest by your tongue, corporal or spiritual, you should slip and fall. Let us watch over our words, our thoughts and our affections to impose silence upon all noises within and without which, by their agitation, arrest the course of the divine action. Let us impose silence upon so many interior enemies, the cries of which prevent us from hearing the voice of God Who speaks to the peaceful, silent and solitary soul, and which thus deprive us of a number of graces.

SECOND POINT.

There is no doubt that a truly Religious soul finds in the observance of silence the perfection of the spirit of mortification and penance.

To have the habit of keeping silence, to speak only through necessity, in a few words or by signs, after having weighed her words and taken all the necessary precautions, is to have already practised great mortification and to have accustomed herself to a life of renunciation. To have a habit of measuring her movements, of regulating her walk and her steps so as not to make any noise; to deprive herself at certain hours of going and coming through the house, or of performing certain actions which are a little noisy, and all this out of respect for holy silence, is to subject herself to much daily mortification and to have accomplished many acts of penance. To direct her affections and inclinations habitually towards God, to impose silence upon nature and self-love, whatever language it may use, whatever tone of voice it may take to seduce us, is to have accustomed herself to a life of very meritorious abnegation. Because we cannot arrive at this without continually practising mortification of the senses, of the flesh and of the mind.

No, it is impossible for a soul truly to preserve interior silence when she gives every liberty to her senses and knows not how to repress the inclinations of nature. All that she sees, all that she hears, all that she seeks after to satisfy them, all that maintains within her the life of nature, likewise keeps up within her agitation and noise; so that there is as little silence in this soul as there is little privation and mortification. Hence it follows that the spirit of silence necessitates that of renunciation and penance and it cannot be practised without them.

By the aid of this same reasoning we are lead to a second conclusion which flows from the first: it is that the practice of silence gives us great facility for acquiring the spirit of prayer and union with God, and that without its habitual practice we shall never acquire the spirit of prayer such as our holy Rule intends. Prayer places us in direct relation with God. It is necessary, then, that all within us should be silent that He might communicate with us, and that His communications might be profitable; for God speaks by silence . . . and in silence . . . ;

and in order to hear Him we must be attentive and refrain from making the least noise. Now, this cannot be when we become dissipated by talking too much; when our passions demand what pleases them; when our memory recalls things which, if not bad and dangerous, are, at least, useless; when our understanding occupies itself with curious, vain and superfluous matters; when it discusses and reasons contrary to obedience, humility or charity; when our will desires what is contrary to the law of God or the spirit of our state. The noise of all these voices should be silenced, that God may speak and be heard by us.

We may then conclude from the thorough knowledge which we have of the matter, that upon the spirit of silence depends the spirit of prayer, and that the more we become strengthened in the perfect observance of this virtue, the more facility we shall have to strengthen ourselves in the spirit of prayer which leads to union with God . . .

When two persons who love each other wish to entertain themselves intimately together, do they not retire to some secret place, far from creatures and from noise? Solitude and silence, these are the precautions which they take to guard the intimacy of their communications: why should it not be the same in regard to the communications of God with a faithful soul?

We have seen that without the spirit of mortification there is no true silence; without silence, no spirit of prayer; without the spirit of prayer, no union with God; without union with God, no true zeal for His glory. This leads us to conclude, in the third place, that the perfect practice of the law of silence facilitates for us the acquisition of the spirit of zeal with which the children of Elias and Teresa should be animated.

What produces zeal in souls? It is the knowledge of God and of His perfections; the knowledge of the weakness of man and the deformity of sin; meditation upon the mysteries of our holy Religion, particularly those which concern the life, the sufferings, and the death of our Lord; in a word, it is the study, the knowledge and the love of truth and justice. How shall we acquire this knowledge? By meditation, prayer and spiritual exercises: all of which can be done only in silence.

The Masters of the spiritual life all agree in saying that the violation of silence is the ruin of the Religious spirit, and experience also teaches us this; for we see nothing but miseries, scandals and the ruin of Religious Orders where silence is not kept. What zeal then can we have or exercise without the practice of silence unless it be a diabolical zeal which destroys what God has done? . . . But if, on the contrary, silence consolidates and perfects the Religious spirit, we may also say that zeal is exercised by the good odor of religious virtue alone and by the edification which is received by all those who frequent a Monastery where the spirit of silence reigns, or visits a person who practises this virtue.

THIRD POINT.

Examples.

The first example which we should here recall to show how important silence is for salvation, into what terrible disorders those souls fall who do not observe it, and the terrible chastisements to which they expose themselves, is that of our First Parents. For having failed in silence we see them succumb to a temptation, disobey God, lose their innocence, and with it the terrestrial Paradise and the friendship of their Creator; and leaving, moreover, to their posterity a heritage of misery and of death. What could have been more innocent in appearance than to notice the beauty of some fruit and to reply to a question addressed to them on this occasion? Nevertheless, it was necessary in this circumstance to keep silence, or to reply to the tempter by a protestation of fidelity and submission to God. Our First Parents failed in this, and thus death entered into the world.

Is not this what takes place among us every day? We begin by a look of curiosity; we afterwards say a useless word; we listen to a dangerous one; passion is aroused: we lose sight of duty; after having hesitated, we waver, we fall and draw others after us in our fall . . . Ah! let us take notice and we shall see that on many occasions we have shown ourselves true daughters of Eve. Let us deplore these faults against silence which in themselves

appear to be nothing, but from which springs a pestilential venom which causes great ravages.

Would Sampson have lost his strength if he had not spoken in an inconsiderate and imprudent manner, revealing to the perfidious Delilah that the secret of his strength resided in his hair? . . .

How many tears did not his conversation with the servants of the High Priest cost St. Peter? If he had not stopped to speak to them, if he had attached himself silently to His Divine Master, in order to defend Him or share in His sufferings, should he have denied Him Whom he loved so much and to Whom he had just sworn to be faithful? . . . Thus it is that an immortification, a loss of time, exposes us to fail in silence and to pass from this to graver faults. Happy shall we be if, like St. Peter, we know how to recognize them, to obtain pardon for them, and to expiate them by working with zeal for the interests of our Divine Master!

We read in the Chronicles of our holy Order that silence was very strictly observed in all the Monasteries of the Reform and particularly so in that of Vallodolid. When a Religious perceived that she had spoken a few unnecessary words, she immediately imposed a penance upon herself; some bit their tongue, others put little stones or wormwood in their mouth, etc. Sr. Anne of Jesus of this Monastery having died during the time of Strict Silence, some Religious who were not able to assist at this death, because they were at Matins, complained in the presence of the dead of having been deprived at one and the same time of a consolation and of a subject of great edification. While they were speaking thus, without thinking that it was the time of Strict Silence, they saw the dead Sister raise her arm and put her finger to her lips as if to make a sign that it was the time of silence. This marvel was admired, but it did not convert the unfaithful Religious, who again began to speak. Then for a second time the dead Sister made the same sign, but in such a manner that it penetrated them with great respect for silence, which they ever afterwards observed very exactly.

The Discalced Carmelite Fathers also were faithful to the law of silence; and penances were imposed for the least infractions of it, such as rattling a sheet of paper in

a manner to be heard in a neighboring cell, during the time of Strict Silence; but they also watched carefully over their tongue at other times that they might say only what was strictly necessary. Thus we see that in the Monasteries of the Reform, there were a great number of Religious, both men and women, raised to a very high degree of perfection and of prayer . . .

St. James says that he who sins not with his tongue is a perfect man, and this is happily experienced in the Monasteries where silence is perfectly observed. We find there souls very holy and very perfect, as was that venerable Religious who, during forty years, exercised himself in the practice of silence, watching over his tongue and over all his interior movements, weighing them all in the balance of the sanctuary and of justice; and who avowed in his last moments that his conscience did not reproach him with one idle word or with one which he ought not to have said. What greater proof can we have of his sanctity than those forty years of a silence so perfect! . . .

Our holy Mother St. Teresa observed silence very strictly, and she practised it with discernment; that is to say, if she knew how to keep silence at a time when she ought to do so, she also knew how to speak to the purpose when this was necessary. She governed her tongue so well because she knew how to govern her passions, to repress in her interior all disorderly movements, and to occupy herself only with things which were good and conducive to the glory of God. This seraphic Mother, who spoke so divinely about spiritual things when obedience constrained her to do so, knew also how to work *in silence*, as our holy Rule ordains. Thus, while working in the kitchen one day, she was ravished in God for a considerable time, during which they were unable to take from her the sauce pan she had in her hand. It was to the observance of silence also that she owed so many other graces with which our Lord favored her.

Our holy Rule directs that we observe silence more especially in particular places of the Monastery. This was practised in certain Convents of Egypt, of which we are told that silence was so carefully observed in Choir that in an innumerable multitude of men, it seemed to be but one man who standing chanted alone in the middle of the Choir. There no noise was made,

and those who transgressed this silence did not go unpunished.

Our holy Mother had taught this practice so well to her daughters that, forgetting herself one day and coughing quite loud during prayer, the Prioress, not seeing who it was that made this noise, as the windows were closed, ordered the noisy Sister to leave the Choir; the Saint, in all humility, did so immediately.

St. John Climacus, who remained for some time in a celebrated Monastery, relates that if the Superior found any of the Religious speaking during the time of prayer, he imposed rigorous penances upon them. He tells us that he had seen several, even among the most aged, who for this fault had been condemned to remain eight days at the door of the Church asking pardon of all those who entered. If a Religious spoke or laughed in the Refectory, he was severely punished. The Rule of St. Pachomius enjoins that for a like fault the guilty one should immediately be reproved, and obliged to remain standing while the others ate.

We have said that the practice of silence facilitates the acquisition of all the virtues; we may also say that from the habit of the virtues flows the practice of silence. Here is one example from among thousands. Several illustrious Bishops went to visit St. Marcian, a solitary, and having seated themselves waited in silence for the Saint to address them. But as he remained for a long time without speaking, one of the visitors, a man of high rank and an intimate friend of Marcian, said to him: "My Father, the illustrious prelates whom you see here thirsting for the waters of your holy doctrine, expect that you will make them flow upon them; do not deprive them then, I beseech you, of the profit for which they hope, and do not withhold the streams of good which you can pour out upon them." After heaving a deep sigh, the holy man replied: "The God of the universe speaks to us continually by His creatures; He instructs us by the Holy Scriptures; He makes known to us our obligations; He teaches us what we should

do and what we should avoid in order to save our souls; He terrifies us by His menaces; He encourages us by His promises; and nevertheless all this is useless because we do not profit by it. How then can Marcian who, like others, abuses these means, or is so tepid as not to make use of them for his salvation, how can he be useful to you by his discourse? . . ." See how humility imposed silence upon this holy solitary, as also upon the illustrious prelates who came to listen to him; thus it is that the knowledge of ourselves, from which humility springs, ought to incline us rather to listen than to speak.

The most perfect models of virtue are also the most perfect models of silence. In the humble house of Nazareth, where three admirable personages practised so many sublime virtues, silence was observed with great perfection and in proportion to the degree of sanctity of each. Our Father St. Joseph spoke little; the most holy Virgin spoke still less, and the Infant Jesus not at all. The Holy Gospel makes known to us some of the words of the Divine Mother and we find in them only acts of humility, obedience, and charity: she spoke for the glory of God, to humble herself, to show her submission to the orders of Divine Providence and to accomplish her duties. But in her greatest sorrows, in the crucifying trials through which she passed, she was silent, and, above all, she was silent when she could have glorified herself because of the marvels operated by her Divine Son; and the Gospel tells us that she kept all these things meditating upon them in her heart.

Our Lord, Whose every word was so holy, useful and perfect, nevertheless kept silence during thirty years and He consecrated only three to the ministry of the word. Before commencing His apostolic career He kept silence for forty days in the desert; and we see Him during the three years of His public ministry often withdrawing into solitude. He imposed silence upon those who wished to praise Him; and when they calumniated Him He was silent . . . All that the Holy Gospel teaches us of His conduct and His maxims shows Him to us as a perfect example

of silence and of the use we should make of our tongue.

To speak through obedience and necessity; to speak little and to speak well; to speak for the glory of God and the good of souls; to speak to the purpose, according to persons, places and circumstances; to speak in an humble and modest tone of voice; in fine, to speak when it is more glorious to God than silence: this is how we ought to speak after the example of our Divine Master and of the Saints who have followed Him.

FOURTH POINT

Examen

What does my conscience say in presence of so important a point of the Rule, the expressions of which are so strong, so capable of making me appreciate silence and of making me fear the violation of it? Alas! for how many faults must I not reproach myself on this subject through dissipation and my immortification! How many times have I not failed against Strict Silence, either by word or action! I should have foreseen in advance what I then said or did, and taken precautions in order to avoid speaking at that time, or making the least noise. I should have prepared certain things so as to avoid going and coming through the house; and for not having done so I have been obliged to leave my solitude at times consecrated to Strict Silence, to make a noise, to annoy others, and often even to speak . . .

How many times have I employed words instead of the signs which are in use among us? If I had studied these signs well, by exercising myself habitually in them, particularly at the time when I had need of them, I should not have exposed myself to fail so often in silence. When necessity obliged me to speak, have I done so only in places permitted? Have I closed the door carefully, have I spoken in a low tone and said only what was strictly necessary?

At recreation, on days of extraordinary recreation, and when visiting the sick, have I spoken with hu-

mility and modesty? Have I spoken only of what was good and useful? Have I made use of humble, religious and becoming expressions? Have I said agreeable things in order to make others cheerful, through a motive of charity and not through vanity, lightness and immortification? Have the absent been spared in my conversations? Have I avoided cutting remarks, light and unsuitable talk?

Have my conversations turned upon the world, upon what was going on in the Monastery, the different employments or offices? Have I permitted myself to make remarks about the incapacity, real or supposed, of persons who might fulfill these duties; about the Sisters employed in these charges or offices; about the intentions and motives of Superiors in such matters, as relating either to the Religious, or to the spiritual or temporal affairs of the Community; do I avoid all conversations of this kind which are capable of causing temptations contrary to charity, obedience, the spirit of faith, etc.? Oh! what evil is done by such gossiping, which seems nothing in itself, but the consequences of which are very fatal! Have I humbly given way in little discussions where there was a diversity of opinions concerning things which were not essential? And as to things which were grave and important, have I kept within the bounds of humility and charity?

Have I shown myself susceptible and punctilious to excess? Have I spoken words which were bitter, of a double meaning, calculated to give a lesson to some one of the Sisters, or to give her to understand that I had not forgotten an incident or some words which had offended me? . . . Have I not openly reprovèd others without having an authority to do so? Have I not maliciously revealed their little miseries, their simplicity or their awkwardness?

Have I spoken with respect to those who have authority over me? with kindness to my equals or inferiors? with compassion to the weak and the infirm? with charity to everyone? Have I not interrupted others through eagerness to express my own thoughts? Have I not spoken with pride and self-sufficiency, affecting to be

learned and witty? . . . Alas! alas! on how many occasions, instead of showing off, as my foolish self-love pretended, have I not succeeded only in displaying my misery, and in exciting in others feelings of compassion and pity? (I do not say feelings of mockery or contempt, because the charitable and religious souls who surround me confine themselves in this to pitying those who are so light and so wanting in humility, and to praying for them.)

Have I faithfully kept the secrets confided to me? Have I not spoken of what took place in the offices, contrary to the prohibition we have received? Have I not given my confidence unseasonably, exacting the promise of not speaking of it to the Prioress? Have I not testified discontent at her conduct and her proceedings? . . .

How have I conducted myself in the parlor, in my conversations with seculars? Have I not shown myself curious by questioning them in order to hear the news? Have I not taken pleasure in conversations which were useless, light, and capable of flattering my self-love? Have I not spoken imprudently of what was going on in the house? Have I testified in any way the desire which I had of being visited by persons from without, relatives or friends? . . . Have I not spoken without necessity and without permission of what I had heard in the parlor? . . .

How have I observed silence in my walk and in my actions? Have I been faithful to walk quietly, to prevent the doors from slamming, to raise the latch gently so as to observe upon this point our Rule of silence? Have I avoided making noise in our cell with the chair, the bench and the little objects which I use? Have I taken means to be heard as little as possible in going and coming through the house?

How have I observed interior silence? . . . Have I not permitted myself to see, to hear, to converse about all that was capable of stirring up my passions, exciting my imagination and occupying the faculties of my soul at the expense of virtue and the glory of God? . . . Have I watched habitually over all my senses in order to preserve my soul in solitude and united to God in silence? . . . Does not my conscience justly reproach me because of much negligence in observing religious

modesty; so many occasions on which I cast light and curious looks at all that I met with on my way, or which came under my notice, upon what such a Sister did, what was in such a cell or such an office, etc.? Hence followed useless thoughts, calculations, interpretations, suspicions of injury: in a word, movements and noises which have turned away my poor soul from the silent communication which it ought to have had with its God.

What would my conscience say if I interrogated it upon the use I have made of my others senses to the prejudice of interior silence? . . . It would recall to my mind that in such and such a circumstance I have listened to what was being said instead of passing on; that on such another occasion I have turned a deaf ear to the voice of God Who asked of me a little sacrifice, a little mortification, etc. . . . Have I watched over my imagination so as to impose silence upon it on those occasions when it generally becomes excited and in which its noisy activity prevents me from hearing, not only the voice of God, but even that of reason? How many times, instead of repressing it, have I not myself furnished it, at the expense of humility, obedience and charity, with innumerable arguments which have deluded my soul and prevented it from receiving the lights of the Spirit of God and from nourishing itself with the holy word which can be received only in silence? . . .

Have I watched over my memory? To speak truthfully, I must acknowledge that not only have I listened with complacency to what it recalled of vain and dangerous remembrances, but I must also admit that I have often interrogated it about a thousand things which it is essential that I should forget, and which, perhaps, were already being effaced from my mind? . . . Am I not very guilty for having thus called back into my soul enemies capable of destroying the work of God by their agitation and noise? Again, how many times have I not burdened my memory with things which I ought to bury in an eternal forgetfulness so that my interior silence may not be troubled by them! Alas! what has been the result of it? Much loss of time in listening to all these vain, useless remembrances, flattering to self-love, or capable of wounding it and of giving rise to antipathies and aversions . . . What profit should not my soul have

drawn if, on the contrary, I had enriched my memory with things which were edifying, useful, capable of inclining me to virtue and of making me labor for the glory of God!

What use have I made of my understanding, of that noble faculty which has been given to me to know God, to meditate upon His law and the mysteries of our holy Religion, to produce in my heart holy affections, lead it to perform acts of virtue and keep up within it the fire of divine love? Have I imposed silence on my understanding when It wished to reason upon subjects contrary to the spirit of my state; when I made it work at developing thoughts which I ought to have left enveloped in ignorance and which have made dangerous impressions upon my mind? Ah! if God had treated me according to the rigor of His justice, when He saw me laboring with my understanding upon matters which were often opposed to His Will and His glory, would He not long ago have deprived me of its use by reducing me to the state of a beast? . . . But, if He has acted with mercy by preserving this noble faculty, I have at least lost the fruit which I ought to have drawn from my fidelity in directing it aright, and in imposing silence upon it every time it prevented me from listening to the voice of God. And this has happened when I reasoned against obedience, against humility, against charity; when I wished to understand things capable of distracting me from the recollection of the presence of God, and when I have even wished in these things to surpass the bounds prescribed to human intelligence.

How many times have I failed in interior silence by occupying myself with spiritual things which are above my capacity? or by seeking to penetrate into the secrets of God, reasoning upon the decrees of His Providence as well as upon the events which it directs, forgetting that I ought to admire these things without penetrating into them . . . Oh! beautiful silence of the simple soul who denies and forgets herself to remember only God and her duty! . . . Oh! beautiful silence in which we hear neither the cries of self-love, the movements of passion, nor the noisy stir of the imagination, but only the voice of the Well-beloved; and in which the faculties of the soul, disengaged from all things, do the work of

God in union with His grace! Who will give us to work in this precious silence! The grace of God will aid us to do so; but we should give Him the facility to operate in us by our vigilance in removing from our interior all that is capable of distracting us; by correcting our faults, subduing our passions, regulating our desires and mortifying both our interior and exterior senses

Have I done this until now? . . . If my heart is not the abode of silence, whose fault is it? I wish to see and to hear all things; I seek after pleasure, news, distractions and amusements; and I afterwards complain of the bustle which reigns in the house of my soul! . . . I complain that I understand nothing of spiritual things, and that God does not communicate with me! . . . Why complain of all this, since I myself introduce into my interior creatures which interrupt its silence and are an obstacle to my union with God! Let us destroy the cause of the noise and we shall have silence . . .

CHAPTER FOURTEENTH—(Continued).

SECOND MEDITATION.

Text: *At other times, although you are not obliged to observe silence so rigorously, yet great care should be taken not to talk too much; for, as it is written and experience teaches, in the multitude of words sin shall not be wanting, but he that hath no guard on his speech shall meet with evils. Again, he that useth many words shall hurt his own soul; and our Lord says in the Gospel, that for every idle word that men shall speak they shall render an account on the day of judgment. Therefore, let every one make a balance for his words and a just bridle for his mouth, lest. . . . etc.*

FIRST POINT.

After having meditated upon the manner of observing Strict Silence and that Silence which is customary among us, let us see how we should make use of speech: *at other times*. Out of the time of Strict Silence we are permitted to speak, first, about our employments and the duties of our office, to those who surround us; secondly, during visits which we receive in the parlor; thirdly, at our daily recreation; fourthly, on extraordinary recreation days and during visits to the sick.

We have seen in the preceding Meditation with what circumspection we ought to watch over our tongue in the employments and in the duties of the different offices, in order to say only what is strictly necessary, in a few words, and in a low voice, when we cannot be understood by signs. It is useless then to enlarge more upon this point.

As regards visits received in the parlor, our holy Rule tells us, in a few words, how we should conduct ourselves there: *Great care should be taken not to talk too much; for, as it is written and experience teaches, in a multitude of words sin shall not be wanting. . . .* We should then, according to the spirit and the letter of our holy Rule, avoid too many words, and not speak in the parlor except of good and edifying things; for according to the expression of our holy Constitutions: "It is important that profit be gained and time not lost in visiting and conversing with Nuns"—"The Religious

should converse as seldom as possible with persons from without, unless their conversation be spiritual, and even then it should be as brief as possible”

Let us be well convinced that a multiplicity of words, even about things which are good, is never edifying in a Carmelite Religious. When persons who visit our parlors hear there only a few simple, useful and agreeable words which have been seasoned with a sweet and modest gaiety, they return home with more profit than if they had been inundated with a deluge of spiritual or worldly talk; if we had given them long sermons, related to them a great number of incidents, overwhelmed them with a thousand examples and quotations from the holy Scriptures, etc In the first case this religious reserve causes our visitor to be edified and penetrated with respect for the soul who allows nothing to escape through the grates except a sweet perfume of modesty, humility, and charity.

In the second case, the impression is most unfavorable; these persons upon leaving the parlor, divert themselves at our expense, because of the weariness which our long and empty talk has caused them. They think that we enjoy these visits; that we willingly indemnify ourselves in the parlor for the rigor of our regular solitude and silence; that we would figure much better in a drawing-room than behind a grate. They notice our irreligious words and tone of voice, and they then suspect us of pretending to be a person of great intellect, or learned in mystical ways. And we must acknowledge that their impressions do not give glory to God!

Let us then act in such a way as to speak little and well; in order to do this let us never speak of things of the world in a worldly manner, let us avoid a multiplicity of words, vanity, lightness, self-sufficiency and affectation. Let us not affect either a preaching or a jesting tone; let us speak simply and with modesty of those things which are agreeable and, at the same time, useful to those who visit us, according to the position, the character, the temperament, the age and the condition of each. Using discernment, prudence and discretion, let us make ourselves all to all, in order that we may gain all to Jesus Christ, or at least do them as much good as possible. Let us neither show ourselves curious nor eager to question

or to relate things; let us weigh our words in the balance of religious justice; let us be gay without dissipation, open without expansion, and agreeable without flattery or affectation.

Let us observe in our correspondence what we observe in the parlor; because our letters, like our conversations, should be rare, short, useful, simple and always edifying.

In the third place, daily recreations require of us a very particular attention, in order that we may assist at them according to the spirit of our holy Rule and Constitutions. This Community Act has been established for our mutual edification; to give the mind some agreeable diversion which will dispose it to return again with more facility to the exercise of prayer; and to draw closer the bonds of charity. This is expressed in our holy Constitutions by these words: "The Prioress may allow the Sisters to converse together as they please, provided the subject of their conversation be suitable to Religious persons, and during this time they are to do their work. No games of any kind are permitted, for the Lord will furnish them with the means of consoling and recreating each other within the bounds of piety and religion, and whilst they do this their time is well employed. They should endeavor to be affable and agreeable to one another, as our Lord Jesus Christ many times commanded His disciples; for, being but few in number, they can easily do this, in imitation of their heavenly Spouse, Who gave His life for all. Besides, this mutual and general love will greatly contribute to the benefit of their souls."

After this we may consider our recreations: first, as a school of mutual edification; second, as a place of relaxation; third, as a bond of charity.

In a school one finds means of instruction and subjects of emulation. Here, the mutual communication of edifying subjects ought to augment in each one of us a knowledge of things proper to incline us to good, increase our desire to practise and give us more facility to execute it. Here, each one, while regarding herself as a disciple, fulfills, without knowing it, the office of a teacher on account of the good edification which she gives by her religious conduct, her manner and words.

To profit well at any school whatsoever it is necessary to attend it with exactitude and in a spirit of dependence;

to behave one's self there with regularity and propriety, and to do all that is to be done with a good will and with the desire of profiting by the lessons of the master. We should then go very promptly to recreation in a state of dependence, regularity and piety, with a good will, turning to profit all that we see, do and hear there; and comporting ourselves with great self-abnegation, like good and simple children with whom one can do whatever they will.

The exactitude of a Religious soul in joining her Community wherever it may be gives great edification, because she shows in this a spirit of faith and obedience and a desire to please God by going promptly where His voice calls her. She also testifies to her Mothers and Sisters the value she sets on their society, and her good will to receive in their midst and through their means, the graces which God designs to communicate to her at that time. For our Lord presides at all recreations according to the promise which He has made: Wherever two or three are gathered together in My Name, there will I be in the midst of them."

The spirit of regularity is necessary at recreation for general edification; thus we should be more faithful there than any where else, to all the little observances prescribed, such as not speaking at the same time as the Mother Prioress; of kneeling when we address her; of not answering in her stead when some question is addressed to her; of not contradicting her, and in many other little practices by which we show for her a filial respect. We are also recommended to do the same in regard to the one who presides in her absence; to be attentive to the older Sisters; not to have private conversations and in a low voice with our neighbors; not to laugh loud; not to interrupt those who speak; not to speak ourselves too often, too loud, nor of things foreign to those conversations which a good Religious should hold, etc. . . .

We should also give edification at recreation by our spirit of piety, humbly taking part in conversations upon pious subjects, furnishing with simplicity some of these subjects which we have taken either from the reading in the Refectory, from other books in our use, or from some instruction which we have heard; or, by relating to the purpose, and in an agreeable manner, edifying examples

from the Lives of the Saints. In a word, we should take pleasure in all conversations which turn upon matter capable of keeping up within us the spirit of our vocation, of procuring glory to God and good to souls, and we should prove it by showing our esteem for holy things, and a contempt for all that is worldly.

It would, however, be understanding this spirit of piety very badly, to believe that we should discourse only upon holy and elevated subjects. Our recreations are not conferences of mystical or high spirituality, nor Chapters for treating of the Observances of the Order. The spirit of piety which we ought to bring there consists only in the respect which we show for the things of God, and in the simple manner in which we speak of them when occasions present themselves for relating some edifying examples, or of applying them happily to some little event which has taken place; it consists in the humility with which we take part in what the others say; and lastly in our religious and charitable deportment. It would then be contrary to the spirit of the Constitutions to prolong discourses upon elevated subjects, treating at recreation of matters too serious for such a time, when the spirit of gaiety ought to be allowed to exercise itself; for it would be to expose ourselves, in some manner, to profane things so sacred by treating them without the seriousness which they merit.

Our holy Mother St. Teresa tells us in her Maxims that we should not manifest exteriorly the good sentiments which our Lord has given us in prayer, whence we ought to judge that her intention is that we should not occupy ourselves at recreation with subjects that are too interior, mystical and spiritual. On the contrary, she adds further on: "Provided that the subject of their conversation be suitable to Religious persons, they may converse together as they please . . . for the Lord will furnish them with the means of consoling and recreating one another within the bounds of piety and Religion, and while they do this, their time is well employed." Let us then unite the spirit of piety with that of gaiety, in such a manner that our gaiety may not cool our piety, and that our piety may not be offended by our gaiety.

We should, moreover, give edification at recreation by great detachment and entire self-abnegation; avoiding to

occupy others with ourselves; never allowing to appear in us any susceptibility, attachment to our own views, eagerness to speak, to know things, and satisfy self; speaking neither of ourselves nor of our relatives; taking all things in good part; never making known what is painful or repugnant to our nature or to our self-love; losing sight of ourselves, without appearing to do so, either to obey or to oblige others; accommodating ourselves to every thing without troubling anyone; always speaking religiously and simply, without permitting the "ego" to appear either in our words, our manners, or the expression of our countenance. And thus will our recreations, considered as a school of mutual edification, furnish us with means of instruction and of advancement in virtue.

According to the spirit of our holy Constitutions, recreation may be considered as a place of relaxation; that is to say, a place which gives repose, refreshment, and pleasure. The Religious soul finds all this in the reunions of her Community, when she goes there with the requisite dispositions, and when each one seeks only the glory of God and the common good. Yes, she may quietly rest where there is a union of hearts in God; there she may refresh her soul by the pure air which she breathes and the subjects of edification with which she meets; there she rejoices by taking part in the common joy,—a joy which is at once holy and amiable, because it has its source in humility, innocence and purity. If we go to recreation fatigued, agitated, and wearied, either because of our occupations or because of interior pains, temptations, and other physical or moral miseries, the pleasant atmosphere, the amiable expansion of hearts, the reflection of joy we there find, makes us recover the serenity of our soul and causes all these little weaknesses of nature to disappear. We may then say in all truth: "Oh! how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Yes, this union is like the dew which refreshes the morning air and fertilizes the earth. There God sheds His benedictions; there we enjoy true happiness.

But that this may be the case we should go to recreation in a spirit of humility, gaiety and discretion. If it were not for the weakness of our nature, degraded by sin, our souls would never have need of any other relaxation than that of the contemplation of the Holy of Holies, praising

blessing and loving Him, after the manner of the Blessed in Heaven. But, this is no longer the case; the thousand obstacles which we meet in our path in the spiritual life oblige us to struggle laboriously in order to remove them; our darkened understanding only fatigues itself in the pursuit of truth, our faculties are wearied, and the mind, like the body, demands relaxation and repose. This is an evident proof of our weakness, and it ought to be to us a continual subject of humiliation.

This does not mean that this sentiment of humiliation should render us taciturn and gloomy at recreation; true humility, I say, produces a very contrary effect. It has been remarked that souls who are the most humble are also the most gay, for true humility puts us in our place, and consequently at our ease. Now, when we are at our ease, we are neither sad, nor gloomy, nor constrained; we only avoid causing pain to others, troubling or fatiguing them; we put everyone else at their ease as we are ourselves; we can more easily bring to recreation that sweet and amiable gaiety which we should have there, conformably to the spirit of our Constitutions, and according to these words of the Wise Man: "Drive sadness far from you, for it has caused the death of many, and is good for nothing;" and these others: "Where there is bitterness and sadness there is no room for reason." Thus humble souls whom nothing wounds and nothing offends, and who do not wish to wound nor to offend anyone, generally have no bitterness nor sadness about them. They follow the advice of the Apostle: "Rejoice in the Lord . . . Let the just rejoice . . . Let the earth rejoice in God, and let it serve the Lord with gladness" The Prophet King also says that in the abode of the just there is heard nothing but sounds of rejoicing because of their salvation.

All this shows us plainly enough that the spirit of gaiety ought to animate our recreations. It is evident that this does not mean dissipation nor folly: the Holy Spirit had prescribed such things by these words: "Woe to you who laugh": and still less are they like worldly joys and pleasures: "Woe to the world! . . ." and consequently to its spirit And it is certainly not to jest about everything, even on subjects the most sacred. St. Bernard absolutely forbids this to Priests

and Religious, and nothing of the kind should exist among us. No, no, the Order which so firmly closes for us the doors of perdition, has no intention of opening those which are so fatal to the sanctity of our profession. Our gaiety ought to be religious, gentle and modest; it is again the Apostle who recommends this to us. This gaiety unbends our own mind and that of others without prejudice to the religious spirit, because it proceeds from humility, innocence, simplicity, purity and charity. It is this gaiety which causes to penetrate into souls that balm and perfume of which the Prophet King speaks to represent to us the holy joy of brethren united together in God; it is, in fine, this gaiety which cheers and comforts souls at our recreations.

But, to perfect this relaxation, we must join to it the spirit of wisdom and discretion according to what we are taught by our holy Mother St. Teresa in her Constitutions: "their mirth should be modest and discreet." In all things, a wise mind knows how to discern and how to employ to the purpose what is good, agreeable and useful. "The mouth of the just shall meditate wisdom, and his tongue shall speak judgment" because, "the law of His God is in his heart" And it is this spirit of wisdom which makes us understand when to speak, what to say, and how it should be said. Thanks to it we are gay with discretion and sensible without affectation. It is this same spirit which knows how to mingle simplicity with prudence, which is so necessary in all conversations: "Be ye simple as doves," says our Lord, "and prudent as serpents." It is this discretion which makes us interpret everything in a favorable sense, which makes us know how to be weak with the weak, and strong with the strong; which knows, in fine, how to manage all things so well that nothing disturbs us nor causes us to disturb others.

With this discretion we know how to relate to the purpose an edifying example, just as we know how to refrain from doing so when we see that it is not the proper time. With it we understand the utility of a few words, even light ones, which pronounced in such a circumstance, before such a soul who is tempted or fatigued, will do her good by unbending her mind and disposing her to receive later on more substantial nourishment For like reasons the spirit of wisdom prevents us from being

pained or disedified at some discourse which appears useless or a little frivolous. In a word, when each one shows this spirit of wisdom at our recreations, souls leave it truly consoled; but when this is wanting at our reunions, this Community Act fatigues more than it gives repose, and its end is not attained.

If we consider the recreation as a bond of charity, we shall see that the effect of a bond, of whatever nature it might be, is to unite together things that are separate, to strengthen some by means of others and to make of them one single whole . . . This is what recreation should cause among us. Each one goes there with her particular character, her different impressions, her manner of seeing and of doing things, her personal qualifications and defects, even her temptations perhaps, but always with the miseries inherent in our physical and moral constitution, her capacity more or less great, her particular turn of mind, etc. . . . Each one also takes there with her anecdotes and subjects of conversation more or less spiritual, agreeable and useful. These different spirits, united and cemented together by charity, sustain and strengthen one another in such a manner as to form but one whole which glorifies the good God, rejoices the Heavenly Court, consoles the Church, and causes our souls to enjoy true happiness.

But that this may be the case it is necessary that each soul should love and appreciate this bond of union, trying to draw it closer by conducting herself in a virtuous manner. And what is necessary in order to do this? We must first remember that double precept which obliges us to love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God; consequently that we ought to think nothing, say nothing and do nothing which we would not have done to or said of us. We should then avoid entertaining in our mind thoughts, suspicions and judgments contrary to charity. We should never say a word capable of causing pain, such as arguments, reproaches, slanders, mockeries and cutting raileries, replies which are harsh and disobliging, phrases of a double meaning, impatience, rudeness, . . . etc. We should also behave in such a way that our words, our manner and our actions may be tempered by a gentle and benign charity. It is necessary that in all things we show a

sincere and cordial affection for all of our Sisters and likewise a regard and respect for the Prioress and the older Religious.

We should then know how to accommodate ourselves with a good grace to the character of each one; to be open with all; never to contract particular friendships (which point, according to our holy Constitutions, is of the greatest importance); never to seek the conversation of some rather than of others, nor use certain signs which communicate a secret meaning. We should speak amiably of all, both in their presence and in their absence; show ourselves thoughtful of others according to the counsel of the Apostle; avoid noticing, and above all remarking the miseries which escape from human frailty; not become offended at anything, but excuse everything. In a word, we should act in such a way that our reunions, like those of the first Christians, may show to Heaven and to earth that we have but one heart and one mind. If we are thus united by the bond of charity, our recreations become an anticipated paradise where we see and seek God and His glory alone; they are then, conformable to the spirit of our Rule, an exercise glorious to God and profitable to the general and particular good of souls by the mutual edification and the religious relaxation which they procure for them, and by the increase of charity.

But if recreations taken in this manner and with this spirit are very advantageous, let us not forget that they may also be very injurious when we give full liberty to nature. Let us take care not to change into a poison, the remedy which God has given us for our infirmity. In truth, a recreation to which we do not bring the suitable dispositions may become for us a school of dissipation, independence, immortification and levity; a source of weariness, of sadness and of interior trouble; an occasion of division, of animosity and aversions, in fine, of a very swarm of sins, because: *In a multitude of words, sin shall not be wanting. . . . He who hath no guard on his speech shall meet with evils. . . . He who useth many words, (out of time) shall hurt his own soul . . .*

Let us use that balance of which the Rule speaks, to weigh our words and our gaiety. Let us make use of a bridle to govern our tongue religiously and wisely; let us

make every effort that our communications and conversations, as cenobites, may be as glorious to God as should be our solitude and silence, as hermits; because we ought, in both these ways, equally to glorify God.

It now only remains for us to speak of extraordinary recreation days and visits to the sick. We need say very little because all that we have just said on the subject of recreation is applicable here since they have the same end in view. It is important, however, to remark that our vigilance here ought to be more exact and our precautions greater. And here is the reason.

On extraordinary recreation days and in the Infirmary with the sick we are, so to speak, left to ourselves, having the liberty of going where we will, looking at what we like, saying and listening to what we please without anyone's eye upon us to intimidate or hinder us. In a moment of weakness and of temptation, during a private conversation, we may expose ourselves to give and to receive imprudent and hurtful confidences. In a small reunion our self-love can make us speak rather as a master, who gives lessons and makes remonstrances, than as an humble discipline who modestly takes part in what is said. Curiosity, and an eager desire to know things can lead us to ask useless, indiscreet and vain questions about things of the world and the employments and affairs of the house; immortification may lead us to make known perhaps, to the officials what does not suit us in things which they distribute: they, in their turn, may allow themselves to make uncharitable reflections upon the use which the Sisters make of that which they give them, etc. . . .

For the same reason visits to the sick require great watchfulness over ourselves, because there is here, moreover, bodily infirmity which renders the occasion more dangerous; and a soul, pure and strong before these conversations, may perhaps come forth from them with some little injury. All these dangers are not met with in recreation where the eye of the Presiding Sister, which is the eye of God, keeps us in check and recalls us to our duty. It is then necessary, on these occasions, to be well provided with a religious spirit, self-abnegation, charity and prudence; to recommend ourselves to God; to purify our intentions; to keep watch over ourselves; and then

to speak and act in all humility and uprightness, having in view the glory of God, and the good and satisfaction of others, without putting into this balance our own natural inclination or our own satisfaction.

SECOND POINT.

The spirit of our holy Order is perfected by the good and holy use of our tongue; it is easy to convince ourselves of this.

To speak in the manner we have indicated in the preceding Meditation, favors the spirit of penance and of mortification because, to weigh our words and to put a bridle on our tongue entails a number of privations, keeps us in constraint, and arrests all the movements of nature which, without this, would have free sway. Yes, to weigh our words; to avoid slander, lies, exaggerations, jests, etc.; to purify our intention; to keep our place; to watch over our manner, our tone of voice; to observe faithfully the regulations prescribed for recreation; to go there with the triple spirit of piety, fraternal charity, and of a sweet and a joyous expansion, for the love of God alone, favors at once the spirit of mortification, of prayer, and of zeal. Vigilance keeps up the first; dilution of heart joined to gaiety, feeds the second; and union of hearts and mutual edification are the exercise and the nourishment of the third.

Let us know how to observe right order in all things. We should not imagine that to be good Carmelites we must never speak, or, that we must speak only of the love of God and of high and holy things. Our holy Mother St. Teresa had no scruple in speaking of other things for the love of God, and according to circumstances and the persons with whom she treated. Let us not, however, give ourselves up to the contrary excess, persuading ourselves that in order to divert ourselves, it is necessary to be dissipated and to hold conversations opposed to the religious spirit. It is in a happy medium that virtue and the true spirit of our vocation is found. Let us then observe exactly the rules for the good use of the tongue as well as those of silence, and we shall acquire, with the grace of God, the spirit of Carmel.

THIRD POINT

Examples

Our Lord, that great Model of all perfection, teaches us how we ought to speak. He Who, out of the time of His public ministry, kept silence so exactly; He Who spoke only according to the orders of God, for His greater glory and for the good of souls!

His conversation was mild; it did good to all: "Let us go to Sweetness," said those who wished to be consoled and encouraged in their troubles. "Come to Me," He says to them, "and I will refresh you . . ." His conversation was useful and agreeable: He instructed the ignorant, He corrected and absolved the guilty, He encouraged the weak. His conversation was simple and humble: He said nothing in His own praise. "Why do you call Me good," said He, "God alone is good" . . . "My doctrine is not Mine, but His Who sent Me . . ." He did not make use of elegant terms, elevated discourses; what He said was within the reach of all: children, like the Doctors of the Law, could understand Him. His conversation was modest and sober, condemning by His example, as well as by His lessons, our idle words, that is to say, those which have no other end than to satisfy our eagerness to speak and which can produce no good result. For, we should not regard as idle words those which appear useless in themselves but which, however, are said with a good intention, and, because of the good direction which we give them, produce beneficial effects in certain souls, whom a more serious and substantial discourse would perhaps have discouraged. The modest air of our Lord, the tone of His voice, the grace of His bearing, ravished all those who heard Him and gained all hearts. Let us then imitate so perfect a Model when we are at recreation or when we speak elsewhere; let us beg of Him this grace.

What was the conversation of the most Holy Virgin? When did she speak? . . . The conversation of Mary was habitually in Heaven; she spoke rarely and only through duty, for the glory of God and the good of her neighbor. She spoke to her Divine Son to ac-

quit herself of her duties as His Mother; she spoke to Him to fulfill her office of advocate; she spoke to St. Elizabeth to humble herself and to exalt the greatness and the mercy of God; in fine, she knew how to speak and when to be silent according to the time, the place, the persons,—obeying only the Spirit of God. Mary spoke with great modesty and reserve, with wisdom and to the purpose, with simplicity and purity of intention; she spoke calmly and without eagerness; the tone of her voice was neither loud nor affected; she spoke in a sweet, gracious and obliging manner; she spoke with great charity and sincerity . . . Mary spoke of the things of God, or of those relating to his love and His glory. She spoke of her duties, of things useful to her neighbor, or necessary for his instruction; but never of useless nor of worldly things.

Our holy Mother St. Teresa practised herself what she so wisely ordained in her Constitutions in regard to the manner of speaking. She spoke to the purpose, usefully and very agreeably; but always for the greater glory of God. She spoke simply, but never in a crude nor light manner. Although she knew how to speak wonderfully of the highest spiritual matters, she disdained not to converse about the most commonplace things in order to accommodate herself to those with whom she treated. Very often she also acted in this way through humility, in order the better to hide her virtue, and this to the point of causing astonishment in persons who, having a high opinion of her sanctity, expected to hear her discourse of very high matters. For they said, after having heard her: "Here is a Saint who speaks like everybody else; there is nothing extraordinary about her." Her conversation was at once gay and edifying; she recreated her daughters usefully and agreeably, God giving her a special grace for this because her intention was so pure. Thus she says in her Constitutions: "The Prioress may allow the Sisters to converse together as they please, provided the subject of their conversation be suitable to Religious persons, and during this time they are to do their work. No games of any kind are permitted, for the Lord will furnish them

with the means of consoling and recreating each other within the bounds of piety and religion, and whilst they do this their time is well employed."

Our holy Mother here manifests also the desire that we should not render ourselves wearisome to one another, either by an extravagant gaiety, or by conversations which are out of place; she wishes that all things should be done with discretion, and this is what she herself did so marvellously in her conversations and recreations. She did not wish that her daughters should entertain one another about themselves or their relatives, nor boast of themselves in any way, she reproved and humbled those from whom some vanity or lightness of this kind had escaped. She has forbidden games and warded off idleness as things contrary to the spirit of mortification and poverty, in order that manual labor might be a preservative against dissipation, weariness and too much freedom, and also against idle words, with which the reunions of women abound, and who without work have nothing else to do but to talk or to play.

She watched with great care to see that they did not entertain themselves with worldly things. We read in the Chronicles that she appeared after her death to a Religious of one of her Convents, on a day upon which they had spoken of worldly things at recreation; and she charged her to tell the Prioress not to permit like conversations again.

Our holy Father St. John of the Cross, who had been instructed by our holy Mother herself concerning the manner in which we should recreate, has also left us beautiful examples for the right direction of the tongue. All useless words were banished from his conversation, for he spoke little and well. He never said anything in his own praise; if he spoke of himself or of his relatives, it was only to humble himself, and to make himself despised by showing that he was of common extraction and that his parents were of the working class. He never said anything contrary to charity; but he was always cheerful at recreation, notwithstanding the great austerity of his life and of his doctrine, so crucifying for human nature.

He attracted all by his gentleness and kindness. Hard only to himself, he poured into the hearts of others the balm of sweetness to lead them gently to the abnegation which he himself practised; it was this complete abnegation which rendered his conversation so mild, so agreeable, so humble and so useful to all.

St. Aloysius Gonzaga went to recreation with so great a spirit of faith and dispositions so perfect, that he feared not to say that if he knew that God had fixed the moment of his death at that hour, he would not go elsewhere to die; believing that he was sufficiently prepared when he did well, at the time prescribed, when the Rule ordains.

Would we be willing that our last hour should sound during the time of recreation? What are our dispositions in this respect? This is what we are now going to examine seriously. . . .

FOURTH POINT

Examen

What use have we made of our tongue? Out of the time of strict silence, of what have we spoken? Why, and for what motives, have we done so? . . . Have we not been led to speak through human motives, in order to satisfy ourselves or to bring ourselves forward? Was it necessary for us to speak? Have we spoken only of what was strictly necessary? Have we said only a few words, in a low and modest tone of voice, having in view only the glory of God and the good of our neighbor? . . . Alas! it is not charity that inclines us to give pain to others by cutting, rude and impatient words! The love of God and His glory does not incline us to speak of things opposed to it, to satisfy our curiosity or of our love for talk in entertaining ourselves with things contrary to the holiness of our vocation.

The examen in the preceding Meditation may serve for what concerns the use of the tongue in our employments and in the parlor; let us examine ourselves here concerning the manner in which we have conducted ourselves during ordinary recreation, extraordinary recreation days and visits to the sick.

Do we go to recreation as to a school of edification, where we should receive and give good example? How have we profited by the edification given us by our Sisters? Instead of taking part in conversations upon the love of God has not the lightness of our mind made them wearisome to us? Has not the modesty, the gentleness and the mortification of this or that Sister, instead of ~~of~~ exciting our emulation or strengthening us in humility, been for us a subject of laughter or pleasantry? Have we not perhaps even disconcerted this Religious to the point of leading her to retrench something from her virtuous practices? . . . By a contrary defect, have we not, in some way, been disedified at the gaiety of others, at the anecdotes which they have related, at the foolishness and simplicity which have escaped them, or at little actions which showed their weakness or imperfections? In fine, do we know how to draw good out of all that happens in order to be edified? Do we contribute to the common edification by our words and actions?

Can our companions be edified by our own light and sometimes ill-timed words, our accounts of the world, the esteem which we appear to have for what it calls greatness, nobility, riches, beauty, talent, a gifted mind, etc.? Can they be edified at our want of respect for authority, for the older Religious, for virtue, when they hear us speak at the same time as the others, not interrupting our own discourse when the Prioress speaks, interrogating her without respect, addressing her questions which are ridiculous, embarrassing, or cunning, and which may compromise her authority; interrupting her, contradicting her, etc.? Can they be edified at our dissipation, our loud laughter, the sharp tone of our voice, our eagerness to give advice without being asked?

What edification can they receive in hearing us speak so often of ourselves, attaching so much importance to all that concerns ourselves as if there were nothing more interesting than this "ego" whom we desire so much to bring forward; as if it ~~was~~ necessary that each one should know what pains us or

what gives us pleasure, what suits us or what fatigues us, what we like or what causes us disgust, the inconveniences which the rigor of the seasons makes us endure, etc., etc. . . . Can they be edified at so many immortified words, at so many reasonings and calculations to avoid some little inconveniences, so much seeking after our ease, so many remarks about what flatters the senses, and which we cite as wonders; in a word, so many conversations which display so little humility, mortification and obedience? What must they think of that cutting tone which spares no one, not even the Prioress nor the older Religious, which decides, pronounces judgment and condemns, without remembering that there is a certain decorum to be maintained, differences of character to be considered, virtues to be practised and regulations to be observed? Is all this edifying?

Are our actions any more edifying? Is our bearing religious, modest and mortified? Are we humble, submissive and respectful in our manner? Do we respect all the Religious and do we show good breeding? Do we know how to inconvenience ourselves to accommodate others? Do they see us faithfully observe the little regulations: kneeling to speak to the one who presides, to ask her for the usual permissions, prostrating when we ought to do so, etc.? Alas! how can they be edified at our little exactitude in going to recreation, always having something to do at that time or some pretext to absent ourselves from either a part or the whole of it when we are not in a humor to remain there? How can they be edified at our slothful and immortified bearing; at all those movements of nature which makes known our little inconveniences, putting ourselves at our ease, choosing such a place more to our liking than another; at our irreligious gestures; our boisterous and excessive laughter, those little airs or grimaces which show that we blame or despise what is said or done? What edification can our rudeness, our impoliteness, our movements of impatience or ill-humor give?

Have we contributed towards making the recreation a place of diversion where souls find repose, re-

freshment and pleasure? Have we furnished agreeable subjects for conversation? Has our manner been gracious and kind? Is our gaiety humble, gentle and modest? Ah! what charms this gaiety has for those who surround us when, as we have already remarked, it has its source in humility, innocence and purity! . . . Alas! we affect, on the contrary, a foolish, extravagant gaiety; we wish to appear amiable and spiritual, and we only succeed in showing ourselves very fatiguing and very proud; we wish to cheer up the others but at the expense of charity, virtue and the religious spirit; we are light, dissipated and frivolous, rather than truly gay according to the spirit of our vocation. Our unbecoming sallies respect nothing; we jest about everything, and often even about holy things. We always find some way of putting in a word of pleasantry out of time in order to turn away the attention from a conversation as agreeable as it is useful.

Do souls find a religious diversion in our fatiguing repetitions of little nothings which we bring in at every turn; in a play upon words or other trifles of the same kind, which we unceasingly produce; in our eagerness to notice and to make known the grammatical mistakes and the weaknesses of others? Can we procure for them an agreeable relaxation by our doctoral tone of voice, the grave and dry sentences with which we season our discourse; by our reflections too elevated or mystical; by our wearisome recitals, our curious and fatiguing questions, our susceptibility and perpetual contradictions? . . . What relaxation do we give to our Sisters when we allow ourselves to display our gloomy and melancholy humor; when we are sulky and taciturn, inclined to blame all that is said or done, muttering some discontented words, replying in monosyllables to questions addressed to us, and taking no part in the gaiety of others, except to make from time to time some pointed remarks?

How have we drawn together the bonds of charity at recreation? Have we not, on the contrary, many times broken them by cutting, disobliging, harsh, rude and haughty words? . . . How many times have

we not wounded the feelings of our Sisters by taunting and offensive words, which turned into ridicule their person, their appearance, their manners, even their virtues and their great regularity, or which recalled some of their past weaknesses, and pointed out those of the present? How many times have we not occasioned temptations to our Sisters by our imprudent talk relating to something others had said or done against them? How many times have we not caused pain to one of our companions by words of a double meaning spoken to a neighboring Sister; or by speaking in a low tone which gave her to understand that we were turning her into ridicule? How many times has our silence upon certain questions produced an uncharitable effect?

Again, has not charity suffered in my conversations regarding the conduct of others? Have I respected the absent? Have I not contested about trifles in such a manner as to disconcert or to exercise the patience of another? Have I not wrangled about words and trifles? Have I not fomented aversions, animosities and desires of revenge by publishing things until then unknown, and which have given rise to suspicions, provoked false judgments, and ruined charity in the hearts of others? What precipitate and rash judgments communicated to others, what temptations made known against this one or that one!

Do we remain unconcerned, not becoming offended by a conversation held about us, by a sulky, an abrupt manner, often even by a smile, which we suspect is meant to despise or to mock us? Have we pained others and exercised their patience by our noisy movements, our irreligious manners, our air of self-sufficiency? Have we viewed the miseries of others with a charitable eye, interpreting favorably what in itself appeared defective.

How have we conducted ourselves on extraordinary recreation days? Was it in such a manner as to strengthen charity, and to draw closer its bonds? Have we not profited by a private conversation to point out the defects, real or supposed, of this one, the physical or moral miseries of that one; to enter-

tain ourselves about the officials and the offices, reasoning about the distribution of the work and the employments, about the incapacity of one, the blunders and the awkwardness of another, the pretensions of this one, the character of that one, comparing some with others, and always ending by inflicting some wound upon charity? . . . Have we not made Superiors the topic of our accusations; and also those persons whose qualifications and employments reflected on us? Have we not made observations, and even reproaches, without having either the right or the authority to do so? Have we not been more apt to remark the defects than the virtues of our Sisters?

Have we lost our time in fruitless occupations on days of extraordinary recreation, employing them in endless talk? Have we shown ourselves mild, humble, modest, accommodating, full of kind attentions, charitable, gentle and simple? . . . Have all our Sisters been able to approach us with that abandonment and sisterly confidence which gives them no fear of troubling us, of causing us any inconvenience, and much less annoyance?

When sick, have we agreeably recreated our Sisters who had the charity to visit us? Have we not appeared more affectionate towards some and more eager to see them than others, receiving them with a good grace and showing ourselves taciturn with others? . . . Have we taken in good part their behavior towards us?

Have we ourselves known how to console the sick in a religious and encouraging manner? About what have we entertained them? Was it about things which could aid them to turn their sickness to profit, and which, by diverting them, served, in some way, as a remedy? Have we not asked them questions which were too curious concerning their ills, their remedies, their nourishment, their Infirmary and their companions in the Infirmary? How many times have we not given them to understand that we did not approve of the orders of the physician; saying that we had no confidence in him, his remedies being contrary or ineffectual for their kind of sickness; citing examples

to strengthen this, and giving them perhaps an account of our own maladies, in which such or such a treatment had been followed, etc., etc? How many times have we not spoken of our own disgusts and repugnances, our delicacy and weakness, making them known when we should have humbled ourselves in silence for them, if we had not the courage to correct ourselves of them? . . . How many times have we not thus authorized the sick to refuse such or such a food by irreligious words such as these: "I will not take this broth because it will hurt me. . . Things must be cooked in such a manner in order that I might experience any relief from them," etc., etc.? . . .

Alas, alas! what profit can a poor sick Sister draw from such light conversations, particularly when we add to them some reflections about the negligence of the Infirmarian or the little skill of the Cook, etc.? Is this what our ancient Fathers and Mothers did and said in their visits to the sick? Do we not know that when sick themselves it was necessary to employ the virtue of obedience to oblige them to say what food they liked best and to make them humbly submit to do it; and they did so with such confusion that it never entered their minds to speak of it to others.

Have we not entertained the sick about things of the world, making known to them news from without, or that which concerned the house, the miseries of this one and that one; in a word, spending our time with them in a very human and irreligious manner? Why could we not entertain these souls with things which could be useful and agreeable to them, such as some examples from the lives of the Saints, or beautiful passages from our spiritual reading? Why not turn away from the miseries and the consequences of their sickness, so as to make them see only its advantages and its fruits? Why not go to be edified ourselves by the patience of the sick, their resignation, their obedience, their mortification, their abandonment into the hands of God, and the other virtues they show in the midst of the miseries of their physical state?

Has it not happened that we were disedified at some imperfection which escaped a sick Sister, instead of

thinking that in a like situation we should have perhaps done worse? For if it is very difficult, in ordinary circumstances, to judge wisely of any exterior act which appears bad in itself, I dare to affirm that it is impossible to form a very just judgment upon the weaknesses which are shown in sickness. If then we witness something which appears to us a little irreligious, let us be careful not to be disedified; let us make known nothing of it to our companions; but let us not believe ourselves, on this account, authorized to do the same in case of sickness. Let us converse with the sick about the precious advantages to be drawn from corporal infirmities, and of the manner in which we can profit by them to glorify our good God.

What an account shall we not have to render one day, if we do not watch over our tongue! . . . Let us begin from this moment to put a bridle upon it that it may no longer commit so many ravages. Let us always have a very pure intention in our conversations; let us weight our words according to time, circumstances and persons, and, for this purpose, let us always have in hand the balance of justice lest, according to the warning of our holy Rule: *we should slip by our tongue and fall, and our fall be incurable unto death*, Amen!

CHAPTER FIFTEENTH.

Exhortation to the Prior.

Text: And you, Brother Brocard, and whoever shall be elected Prior after you, must bear always in mind and observe in your actions what the Lord says in the Gospel: Whoever would be the greater among you, let him be your minister, and he who would be the first among you shall be your servant.

FIRST POINT.

The first thought which strikes me in reading this Chapter and in beginning this Meditation, is this: How excellent humility is, since it is the only virtue recommended to him who ought to possess them all in order that he might teach them more efficaciously by his example than by his words! . . . It is then true that humility is the foundation and the guardian of all the other virtues, with it we ought to be capable of accomplishing perfectly the work of God, however difficult it may be to our weakness and our natural incapacity . . .

When we enumerate the qualifications which a good Superior ought to possess, we pause perplexed, because it appears difficult to believe that so many good qualities and virtues can be united in one single person. It seems then that in writing our rules for Superiors a number of recommendations should be made to them in order that they might be able to fulfill their charge worthily, without prejudice to their own salvation and with profit to souls and glory to God. It seems that it would be necessary to remind them that St. Paul feared to be lost while working for the salvation of others; that God, having made them His substitutes upon earth to feed His lambs, they ought to be vigilant and devoted Shepherds, united to their flock and enable them to receive and accomplish His Will.

It would seem necessary to recall to their memory the menaces made by our Lord against whosoever accomplishes his work negligently; placing before their eyes the example of the Good Shepherd, Who unweariedly seeks the wandering sheep and gives His life for His flock. Again, it would seem necessary to recommend them to be perfect as their Heavenly Father is perfect, since they are His representatives here below; to make themselves respected, feared, loved, by the practice of the most solid

virtues and the imitation of the divine perfections, as far as it is possible for a creature to approach them, in order that all may find in them goodness, wisdom, strength, justice, mercy, knowledge, etc., and that all may love them as a father, respect them as a master, fear them as a judge, and receive all things from them as from God Himself . . . It would seem that they ought to be spoken to at length about their duties towards God, towards the souls confided to their care, and towards themselves: three very important and very complicated duties if we enter into details!

Again, we could very well remind them of what St. Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus, recommending them to render themselves irreproachable in their conduct as dispensers and stewards of God; to be neither proud, nor angry, nor given to wine, nor violent, nor avaricious for sordid gain; to be prudent, grave, modest, capable of instructing others, mild, affable, sober, just, temperate, etc. They could not be surprised if we reminded them of what our Lord said to His disciples, in order to show them that their conduct should be edifying and full of wisdom: "You are the light of the world . . . A light is placed upon a candlestick that it may give light to all those who are in the house . . . Let your light so shine before men, that others may see your good works and glorify your Father Who is in Heaven . . . You are the salt of the earth: if the salt has lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? . . ." And then all that our Lord said to those who are seated in the Chair of Moses, who bind heavy burdens and place them upon the shoulders of others and with a finger of their own they will not lift them: "Woe to you who close the Kingdom of Heaven to men and who will not enter there yourselves, nor suffer others to enter! . . . Woe to you blind guides!" etc.

All this seems to find its place in that point of our Rule regarding Superiors, that they may understand well how important it is to for the glory of God, for the good of souls and for their own salvation, that they should be perfect as their Heavenly Father is perfect, and that they should teach the practice of virtue more by their example than by their words. Nevertheless, the Rule says nothing to them of all these things; and this Chapter, which it

would seem ought to be very long and contain so many important recommendations, is one of the shortest. We find there only one thing expressed in a very few words. And why is this? Can it be supposed that Superiors are so perfect that it is useless to tell them to become so? Alas! they are like everyone else, children of Adam, and often more exposed than others to show themselves poor in virtue. Whence then comes this brevity in that point of the Rule which concerns them? Here is the reason.

It is that the Superior who will always bear in mind that, being raised by order of God above others, he ought to be their servant, and having been made the first among his brethren, he ought to make himself the last of all, such a Superior, I say, will be humble, and with humility, he will have all the qualities which St. Paul recommends for a Shepherd of souls; he will be what our Lord wished His Apostles to be; he will avoid all that drew down the maledictions of this good Master upon the Scribes and Pharisees; he will be the light of the world; he will be the salt of the earth; he will receive from God the necessary graces for himself, and for guiding securely the souls confided to him: with humility, he will be perfect!

It is sufficient then to recommend to him the practice of this virtue, to be certain that he will possess and practise all the others. While, without humility, although he may have all the knowledge, all the ability, all the talents, and all the qualities desirable, he will never practise any virtue perfectly and he cannot govern souls according to the designs of God. No; without humility, there is no perfect charity, no prudence, no true wisdom, no patience, no mildness; without humility, there is no discernment of spirits, no knowledge of the designs of God, nor of spiritual things, because they cannot be received except through the lights of the Holy Spirit, and God communicates His Spirit only to the little and the humble, according to the words of our Divine Master.

No one then should be a Superior, if he does not feel disposed to be the servant of all. It is only upon this condition that superiority is bestowed upon him, that the lights and graces of which he has need are granted to him, and the success and the reward of his labors are promised to him.

I say that he should dispose himself to become really a

servant, that is to say, to be so by conviction, and in his conduct, regarding his person and his time as dependent on and at the disposition of all those whom he considers as his masters, according to the words of our Lord. How excellent then is humility since it gives birth to, nourishes, guards and perfects all the virtues; since it renders a Superior perfect and capable of doing the work of God in a charge so difficult, so delicate, so perilous and so far above human capacity!

Since this virtue is so excellent, and since it procures so many advantages to the soul, it is then necessary to labor for the acquisition of so precious a treasure, and even to sell all that we have to obtain it; because humility is, of all the virtues, the only one recommended to the person who is called to govern in our Monasteries, that he may worthily fulfill his mission. From this we must infer that if this sublime virtue reigns, not only in the head, but in all the members of a Community, it will be truly a terrestrial paradise. With a Prioress perfectly humble and the servant of all, the Religious very humble in their different employments or charges, and inferiors equally humble: what society can be more united, more pleasant, more beautiful, more agreeable in the eyes of God, of Angels and of men!

Let us then employ all our care to understand, to esteem and to appropriate to ourselves this precious pearl of humility. For this let us labor to acquire a perfect knowledge of the truth, by studying the self-existing Being of God and the nothingness of the creature. Let us dig deep into the earth of our miseries, of body as well as of soul, and if we are in earnest, the brightness of the light which will burst forth from the strokes we give will cause us to enter, through the door of self-knowledge, into lowly sentiments of our own personality, and establish us so solidly there that we cannot but approve of the contempt and the humiliations which may come to us on the part of creatures. In truth, when we recognize the nothingness and the vileness of an object we despise it, and we are very glad to censure it and to see it censured by others.

When we are sincerely truthful we have within us a sentiment of justice which calls for contempt for what is contemptible, and which repulses esteem in case others

wish to show it. Yes, we suffer when we see others esteem an object which is worthy only of contempt . . . We shall then apply ourselves to distinguish between what we are by the mercy of God and what we are through the corruption of our nature; and the discernment of this will lead us to render to each one his due, if we wish to remain always faithful to the justice and truth. To God belong honor, praise, love and glory on account of His perfections and His benefits, and to ourselves belong confusion and contempt, on account of our nothingness, our misery, our ingratitude, our sins, our weakness, our ignorance, etc. To God the honor of the gifts, the talents, and all the good qualities which we possess; to ourselves, confusion because of the evil which is hidden within us.

But this knowledge ought to be practical; so that our words and our actions might be conformable to our thoughts and that in all circumstances, whether painful or agreeable to self-love, we might know practically how to make the division between what belongs to God and what belongs to ourselves. Yes, this knowledge ought to be so strongly impressed upon us that the division of which there is here question, might be made, as it were, naturally and flow from acts of perfect humility. Taking as our guides the Saints who have taught us the theory and the practice of humility, let us ascend to its first degree by conceiving lowly sentiments of ourselves, which will become established in us by the consideration of what we are in the natural and in the supernatural order; and by setting aside what we receive from God so as to descend to the nothingness from which we have been taken, and to sin which is our sole work. Thus enlightened upon what we are, we shall understand what sentiments we ought to conceive of ourselves.

From the lowly sentiments of ourselves let us mount to a love for the contempt and the forgetfulness of creatures which is the second degree to which the love of truth and justice gives us easy access. Does sin merit the esteem and affection of anyone? Does corruption and dust merit honor and praise? Can nothingness and naught become anything and can they occupy the thoughts of others? . . .

To arrive at the perfection of this second degree of the

virtue, it is necessary to labor constantly at the destruction of the "ego" which, far from loving contempt, is so cunning and so skilful in deceiving us that it often makes us take the love of glory and honor for the love of contempt, adorning itself externally with humility to make us pass for something before creatures and fill us with self-esteem. To accomplish our purpose, let us commence by avoiding with care all that can flatter self-love, all that the world calls glory and esteem. Let us fly brilliant actions and the praises of men; let us act as much as possible in the silence and secrecy of solitude; let us avoid appearing before others and causing ourselves to be listened to and noticed; let us act in such a way that no one will occupy themselves with us.

In the second place let us patiently suffer contempt when an occasion presents itself, according to the counsel of the Holy Scripture: "Receive well all that happens to you; support whatever pain you may feel; and in your humiliation be patient;" thus when creatures abandon us, when they make no account of all that we may do or say; when they pay no attention to us, to what touches us, nor to what we have most at heart, except to ridicule it; when we see others honored and exalted at our expense; when we hear them praised while we are blamed; when their advice and counsel is taken while ours is despised, in a word, when our self-love shall receive some great wound, as a thing painful and bitter, it is true, but as being advantageous and very necessary to teach us what we are, to keep us in our place, to destroy self, which is our greatest enemy, and to make us advance in the way of humility, the only way by which we may draw near to God.

It may not be out of place to make a little remark here which, in some circumstances, may be very useful to us. It is this: very often we falsely imagine that we are despised, cast off and repulsed; we take as a sign of contempt a smile, a gesture made unintentionally, a word innocently said, and then we imagine ourselves to be walking in the way of opprobrium, to be the laughing stock of others, etc., and yet it is not so Let us avoid looking at ourselves and at things around us; let us take care not to interpret the intentions of others, and to believe ourselves aimed at in all things; then we will see that it is only our self-love which desires to put itself forward, and thinks

that it is wounded and humbled because it is "lost in the crowd". How many souls there are who, in consequence of these secret pretensions of self-love, are humbled and despised only "in" imagination! Let us be truthful, and we shall not so easily think that we are abandoned and despised. If it happens that we are really so, and in such a manner that we cannot doubt of it, let us humble ourselves and suffer in all patience.

If, on the contrary, we are praised or elevated, remaining attached to the truth, in which the knowledge of ourselves will have already established us, we shall not be affected to such a point as to draw vanity from it; we shall rather feel pained: the superior part of our soul will suffer because of it; it will fear that its head might be turned upon the pinnacle where it is placed; it will sigh at the thought that it has deceived others and that it is deceived itself; it will dread the loss of the precious treasure of graces promised to those who profit by their state of humiliation to unite themselves to our Lord. It was with these sentiments that the Royal Prophet said: "When I was exalted I humbled myself, and I was troubled." Let us do the same in like circumstances; let us call to mind that we have sprung from nothingness, that we are but misery and sin, that we shall return to dust and become the food of worms. Let us humble ourselves by deep and well developed considerations; let us fear to allow ourselves to be seduced by applause and praise, by some seemingly honorable employment; let us take no pleasure nor secret self-complacency in it; let us try, on the contrary, to excite within ourselves a sincere desire for contempt as a lot which is preferable to praise and honor.

I say a sincere desire of contempt, for that "ego", of which we have already spoken, is so crafty that it can cause a sort of phantom of contempt to appear to us and then promises us the honors of humility. It is thus that we can pretend to pass for humble in the minds of others and in our own, because, on certain occasions, in the face of a humiliation which will bring us forward we shall have shown some strength of soul. O my God! how many snares there are to make us distrust ourselves! how many souls have allowed themselves to be caught by them! . . . Let us listen to St. Bernard speaking of

this matter from his own wise experience, he says: "One who is truly humble, does not wish to pass for such; but he rejoices at the contempt which is shown him." We may then be permitted to say, in a contrary sense, that he who has not true humility wishes to pass for humble, and not to be despised; he wishes that others should believe that he is contemned and humbled, but not that he is worthy of contempt; he rejoices only upon occasions which show his apparent virtue, but not upon those which make him known for what he really is.

Ah! let us not weary of studying this precious virtue of humility by studying ourselves. Let us understand well, once for all, that we have within us an enemy who is most opposed to us, an enemy crafty and indefatigable; let us try to discover his artifices; let us not cease to fight against him; let us make every effort, with the aid of grace, to gain a complete victory over him. When we sincerely wish to pass for contemptible persons we then ascend to the third and last degree of humility which consists, as we have already said, in discerning what we are by the grace of God from what we are of ourselves, and through the corruption of our nature. We shall then at once render to each that which is his due, not only through the conviction of our mind and of our understanding, but also in practice, acting always with this conviction that we can do nothing of ourselves and that we can do all things with the grace of God, according to this teaching of our Divine Master: "When you shall have done all that is commanded you, say that you are unprofitable servants." . . . That is to say, if we have succeeded in anything it is to be the grace of God that we owe it, and not to our efforts alone.

This discernment of the operation of God and our own will renders us insensible to praise, no matter what wonders God may operate through our means; we will not think that we are greater or more to be esteemed after having worked miracles than after having swept the kitchen; the glory of God will be everything in our eyes and on our part we shall wish for nothing but confusion and contempt. We may be exalted, esteemed and sought after on account of the divine gifts which we possess, but we will remain abyssed in the knowledge of our own powerlessness and nothingness.

But alas! the practical perfection of this last degree of humility is very difficult to explain when one has not yet reached it. It is with reason that St. Lawrence Justinian has said: "No one can understand well what humility is except he who has received it from God." We can only stammer over it; and besides, to what purpose will it serve us to be so precise about the theory, if we fail in the practice of it? Let us then practise the little that we understand of the perfection of humility; let us beg of God to enlighten us upon what is still unknown to us and aid us to practise it. For, without the aid of grace, how shall we be able to annihilate the "old man"? How shall we render him indifferent to all things that pass with time, so that we may no longer see ourselves either depressed by contempt or elated by honor and praise? . . . The enterprise is difficult it is true; but the success is not doubtful to whomsoever confides in God and resolves, once for all and without reserve, to put self aside so as to see and to desire in all things only God and His glory. Now, it is our own annihilation which procures the glory of this good Master, and causes us to accomplish His precept: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father Who is in Heaven."

To see one's self honored and esteemed by everybody as a Saint, or as a man descended from Heaven, and to remain, nevertheless, always attached to the knowledge of one's own baseness and nothingness, as though he possessed no advantage, this supposes, according to the opinion of St. Bernard, not a mediocre virtue but a virtue very high and altogether extraordinary, and which it is impossible to attain without entire self-annihilation. This word, annihilation, is to be found on the lips of many; but alas! there are very few who understand it practically! . . . And, nevertheless, it is only by practising it that we can realize it, and enjoy the precious advantages of the virtue of humility, which advantages are: peace of soul, repose of conscience, interior joy, and intimate communications with God, whence flow all the virtues, and especially that of pure love and perfection of charity.

SECOND POINT

To render one's self the servant of others, to put one's

self in the last place, below all, according to the teaching of our Divine Savior, and conformably to that point of our Rule upon which we now meditate, does not this strengthen in us the spirit of penance and of mortification?

A master can easily procure for himself ease, enjoyment and repose; he can avoid a number of mortifications by requiring of his servants all that is painful and repugnant, and reserving for himself only what is agreeable and convenient. But the servant cannot dispose, according to his liking, either of his person, his time or his will; he must watch while his master sleeps; he must work while his master rests; he must be exposed to the cold, to the heat and other inconveniences, while his master is sheltered from all these things. After having prepared his master's repast, according to his taste and the orders received, he must content himself with some of the leavings of his table which he has seen so well served, or even with some more common food. In travelling, his master is surrounded by a thousand conveniences: he is at his ease in a well closed and well cushioned carriage, where he might believe himself to be still at his home; the servant is seated on the outside in all sorts of weather, or perhaps walking, without anyone caring about him or making any account of what he endures. He must do his duty as a servant and he has no right to complain; when he entered service did he not know that he could not pretend to be treated as a master, but that he should have to obey, to suffer and to work; and consequently to renounce his rest, his ease, his will, the free employment of his time, etc. . . . ?

When, then, in order to conform ourselves to the example and to the teaching of our Divine Master, we make ourselves the servant of others, we can expect only a life of renunciation, of complete abnegation, and of continual privation: and what is more proper to strengthen in us the spirit of penance? . . . To devote one's self to others, to be always at their disposal and subject to them; to forget one's self so as to be occupied with them, to endure, to suffer in silence in order to procure them repose and relief, to give all one's time to their service: what a continual exercise of mortification! What re-

sources with which to form and to develop within us a true spirit of humility and renunciation!

On the other hand, the considerations which we have made in the preceding Point to enable us to appreciate humility and to establish it in our soul, are also very proper to incline us to penance. For, when we reflect upon what we are, the corruption of our nature, the ravages, the degradations which sin has caused in it, it is impossible that this sight should not make us feel the need we have of repairing such grave disorders by penance and self-renunciation. If we consider that our place is beneath all creatures, beneath nothingness and even beneath the demons, it is impossible that we could dare to complain of what we have to do, to endure and to suffer, in order to satisfy the Divine Justice, to be reinstated in our primitive rights, lost by sin, and to draw upon ourselves the great mercy of God.

The spirit of prayer also draws many advantages from the practice of humility, since it is this which opens to God the entrance of our soul, attracts His divine grace upon us and, at the same time, places us in a state capable of hearing Him and of being heard by Him. God communicates Himself to the humble; He pleases Himself among little ones to whom He reveals His secrets, listens favorably to their prayers, and gives them the gift of true wisdom while, on the other hand, He withdraws from the proud.

Humility separates the soul from creatures and from herself, places it in a state of solitude and silence, and recollects it entirely in God, and these conditions are absolutely necessary to perfect the spirit of prayer. I dare to affirm that, without humility, there is no true spirit of prayer; hence it follows that to perfect ourselves in this virtue, is both to enter and to advance in the way of prayer, for humility removes all the obstacles. It drives away importunate and tenacious distractions, it calms the agitation of the mind, excessive fears, eager desires, and vain apprehensions; it stifles jealousies, aversions, etc., all of which prevent prayer and arrest the operations of the soul. Humility preserves us from a number of faults which, by obscuring our mind, deprives the understanding of the lights necessary to understand the law of God, the practice of virtue, and the means of pleasing the Lord.

This virtue by keeping us in our own place and causing us to accomplish all justice, gives to our prayer an efficacy which all human means could never procure for it; and this is why the Wise Man says that "the prayer of the humble pierceth the clouds; and he will not depart before he be heard." The humble soul who asks only what can contribute to the glory of God, who prays with the conviction of its own unworthiness, and with confidence in the goodness of God, obtains all that she asks and much more than she hoped for. That soul, who is the object of contempt, of calumny, and the ridicule of others, prays for those who injure her, and her prayer does violence to the Heart of God. She who sees her defects in the light of truth, prays to implore mercy and to solicit grace so that she might correct herself of her miseries or profit by them; and God cannot refuse her for He is so much the more liberal towards us when we are most faithful to render Him the glory which is His due, by turning His gifts to good account . . . He shows Himself reserved and gives little to the proud soul, who appropriates to herself the divine gifts and takes complacency in them; but He gives without measure to the humble soul who attributes nothing to herself and knows how to render faithfully all the glory to Him.

It is then true to say that humility greatly facilitates for us the spirit of prayer: by augmenting the lights and the strength necessary to practise the other virtues; by removing the obstacles capable of preventing the operations of the faculties of the soul; by giving efficacy to our prayers; and finally, by uniting us to God in the most intimate manner, since it separates us from sin, the world, creatures and ourselves.

Moreover, humility, by making us cast aside all created things, and raising us above ourselves, places us in a sphere of pure charity which gives us the spirit of zeal. An humble soul alone is truly devoted to God and to His glory; for what is it that places an obstacle in the way of this entire devotedness? Is it not attachment to our petty, personal interests, egotism, self? . . . Now, all this cannot exist in an humble soul; charity alone reigns in her. From this flows that devotedness which a child of Carmel should possess, if she wishes to have the plenitude of the spirit of her vocation.

O Humility! Humility! when shall it be given us to possess thee, since with thee we possess so many treasures! Let us then work to acquire them; for this purpose we must sell all that we have and make ourselves the servants of others as our Lord recommends to His Apostles.. Let us never forget that the only means of procuring for ourselves true exaltation is to abase ourselves, to place ourselves, in truth, in the very last place and to act not as masters but as servants.

Let us return once more to the preceding comparison which will be useful in order to find out practical means for acquiring perfect humility and also the spirit of zeal. The conduct of a devoted servant towards his master shall furnish us with the model of a soul who is truly humble in her conduct with regard to those of whom she has made herself the servant.

We have seen, and still see, good and faithful servants who give freely to their master their heart and their time, and who even sacrifice that which man holds dearest here below. We have seen some of them so devoted that they renounce their rest and their little conveniences to serve and to assist their masters in their distress; they go so far as to give their liberty and their life, consuming themselves in every way for them, braving all that is most painful, imprisoning themselves with them, endeavoring to do all in their power to withdraw them from their misery, to defend them against insults and to save their life when it is in danger. Thus, the truly faithful servant is not content to render ordinary services to his master, but he foresees his orders, forgets himself to seek his master's interests, and carries his devotedness even to heroism, because he respects, esteems, and cherishes his master.

This is precisely what the humble soul does who, forgetting herself, devotes herself entirely to the service of God and of her neighbor. She reverences and loves this God Who is so great, so good, so wise, so perfect; she esteems and cordially loves her neighbor, considering in some the good qualities and virtues which God has given them and which render them superior to herself; in others, she sees the image of God, very degraded without doubt, but which she can repair by her devotedness. Therefore nothing costs her: she forgets herself; she

sacrifices her time, her repose, her tastes, her attractions, her health, even her life, to fulfill her duties of servant in regard both to God, the Sovereign Master, and to her neighbor, whom she considers above herself.

On the other hand, humility favors the spirit of zeal, as it is this which gives it all its efficacy. In effect, to render our zeal efficacious, we must join to acts of zeal, properly so called, example, prayer, confidence in God and diffidence in ourself. Now, humility, as we have already seen, brings along with it the practice of all the virtues; with it our prayer rises even to the Throne of God and draws His graces upon us; with it, we know God and we know ourselves, whence there arises a double sentiment of confidence in the divine operations and diffidence in our own. Thus, there is no true nor efficacious zeal without the virtue of humility.

An humble and zealous soul acts with prudence, wisdom and by the spirit of God; she reproves without bitterness, she corrects at an opportune time; she acts by the inspiration of God, thus her zeal is not hasty; she instructs without haughtiness, and chastises without anger: it is pure charity which guides and directs her in all things. An humble soul never forgets what she is in herself; she bears always in mind these words of our Lord: "The servant is not above his Master"; consequently, she always remains in her own place, whatever be the kind of service which her office imposes upon her in regard to her neighbor. She knows how to command, to govern, and to direct, without leaving her post of servant, just as she knows how to renounce herself and to be submissive while remaining there.

To resume all that we have said: he who wishes to understand perfectly the excellence and the advantages of humility cannot truly succeed, in doing so except by giving himself up in real earnest to the practice of this virtue; he will thus possess all the benefits of grace and of glory.

THIRD POINT

Examples.

It is the pride of Lucifer which has opened the gates of hell where so many proud souls are precipitated; the hu-

mility of the Son of God has opened those of Heaven to allow all to enter who listen to and follow the lessons of the Master Who says to all: "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart."

We read in the Chronicles of a Religious Order that one of the monks having gone to the Refectory to prepare it, found ranged around the tables a great number of Religious in full costume, occupying the places. Surprised the more at this spectacle because he did not recognize any of those who were there, he went to notify the Superior. The Superior at first treated him as a visionary, but finally decided to go to the Refectory where he saw with his own eyes this assembly. Then, wishing to do nothing of his own accord, he assembled his Religious. God permitting it thus for the instruction of all. After investing himself with the sacred vestments, he took the Blessed Sacrament in his hands, and all went in procession to the Refectory. Upon their arrival there, the phantom who occupied the place of honor, gave a signal to his brethren who arose immediately. Then the Superior addressing this one, ordered him, in the Name of our Lord, to declare who they were and what had brought them there. He who had been interrogated, replied that they were Religious of his Order who had exercised in it the highest offices and the most honorable employments; but that some having obtained them through solicitation and intrigues, and others having fulfilled them with pride, presumption and vanity, all had been condemned to the eternal flames for their want of humility, and for not having made themselves the servants of their brethren. And in order to prove that what he said was true, he commanded all the spectres to open their mantels, and at once there was seen coming from their breasts flames and very dark smoke. After which, upon a new signal which he gave, they all disappeared into their dark dwellings, leaving the whole assembly struck with terror, but penetrated with gratitude towards God, Who had just given them a terrible lesson which they still had time to turn to profit. After this example we cannot doubt that it is pride, self-love, egotism and presumption which people the vast gulfs of hell, and that it is humility which fills in Heaven the places which became vacant by the fall of the first proud spirits

In a Community of the Order of Citeaux, there was found a young Religious who enjoyed a great reputation for virtue, and who had always preserved himself pure and chaste. Upon the occasion of an exorcism to take place in the Monastery, the demon was interrogated by the Prior to know if he would still dare to remain in the body of the possessed when this young Religious would have ordered him to go out. "Yes," replied he, "for his pride prevents me from fearing him" . . . What, then, was wanting to this chaste and virtuous young man in order to be really what he appeared, that is to say, a Saint, and to be able to make the spirit of darkness tremble? It was humility that was wanting to him. If he had been humble the devil would have fled at the sound of his voice . . .

A man of rank in the city of Alexandria, presented himself one day at the gate of a Monastery, asking to be received. According to all appearances, he seemed to have preserved the love of the world, of glory and of honors. The Abbot judging him according to the exterior appearance, told him that it was necessary to exercise himself in obedience if he desired to bear the yoke of Jesus Christ: "I am very well satisfied to observe it," replied the suppliant, "and I give myself up into your hands as iron into the hands of the forger . . ." "Since this is so," replied the Abbot, "I wish you to remain at the gate of the Monastery and to prostrate yourself at the feet of all those who enter or go out, conjuring them to pray to God for you because you are a great sinner. This man, as humble as he was obedient, did this during the space of seven years, at the end of which time they consented to receive him into the Community, and to admit him to Holy Orders. But he earnestly begged and obtained the favor of remaining in the same place until the end of his life, which terminated ten days later. The Porter, who had begged him to remember him in glory, and to obtain for him the grace to follow him very soon, died some days after, as if to testify to all that the humility of this man had opened to him the gates of Paradise immediately after the end of his exile upon earth.

Has not our holy Father St. John of the Cross left us wonderful examples of humility? Assuredly he practised, in all its perfection, this point of the Rule upon

which we are meditating, always having present to his mind what our Lord says in the Gospel: "He who is the greater among you shall be your minister, and he who would be the first among you shall be your servant". We read in the history of his life that he had such a thirst for opprobrium and contempt that one day having been asked by our Lord what he desired in return for all the labors he had endured for His sake, John gave this admirable reply: "Nothing, Lord, but to suffer and to be despised for Thy love." He could never be satiated with this food: he sought it, he chose it in preference to all other, as happened a short time before his death.

His Superiors, judging it well to have him change from one Community to another, left him the choice of two houses, one of which was governed by one of his most faithful and most affectionate disciples; the other had as Prior a man of a nature austere unto harshness, and who, moreover, nourished in the depths of his heart a secret resentment against this first Father of the Reform, because he, when Superior, had given him certain reproofs on account of his going abroad too frequently. It was to this last convent that the holy invalid asked to be transported in the hope that he would there be very much exercised in suffering. He was not disappointed in his expectations, and our very hearts are pierced at the recital of all that he had to suffer from a Superior who was carried away by passion. A rigorous prohibition forbade the Religious, almost all of whom were disciples of the Saint, to visit him. If the Prior sometimes entered the cell it was only to speak harshly to him, to pour out bitter recriminations about the past, and he even accused him of introducing relaxation into the Reform by accepting what pious hands had prepared outside of the Convent to relieve him in the exhausted state to which he was reduced. To all these provocations, this holy martyr of patience, this hero of humility, replied only by confessing his pretended faults; he drank with delight this bitter chalice of contempt.

Was not this what he had asked of God, what he had desired all his life? How ingenious he had always been to obtain this for himself! As he was so careful

in hiding his rare merits, so was he pleased to manifest all that could abase him in the esteem of others. He delighted to recall the humble condition of his Father; he sent for his brother to employ him as a workman in the building of the Convents which he founded, and he never failed to present him, in his poor working costume, to persons of distinction who visited him.

But, if he was truly humble, he also showed himself the true servant of his brethren, particularly in the different offices he discharged. Hard only to himself, he was gentle and obliging to all others, comforting them in their trials, sacrificing for them his repose, his strength, and with a good heart would have sacrificed even his life. How many times do we not see him, when Provincial and Superior of the Carmelite Nuns of his Province, interrupt at once his most pressing occupations to go, before they had time to ask him, to console some good soul whose suffering and agony God had revealed to him, though she were the least of all, though she were an humble Lay Sister! . . . Thus, what admirable fruits did not his zeal produce, inspired, as it was, by a charity so devoted and accompanied by a humility so profound! . . .

What shall we say of our holy Mother St. Teresa! She also had a good share of humiliations and contempt: at one time reprov'd in full Chapter as an extravagant person who wished to bring herself into notice and to have herself spoken of; at another menaced by the Inquisition; and again, become the laughing stock of the people of the world and of many others, on account of her writings which some had the indiscretion to communicate to others; at one time accused as a suspicious person by those from whom she should have expected aid and encouragement in the admirable work of the Reform which she had undertaken only by the order of God; again, treated as a person deluded by the devil and deceived by her own self-love; and spoken of as such by a Preacher from the pulpit of a Church which she visited.

Having been imposed as Prioress upon the Religious of the Convent of the Incarnation, they at first refused to recognize her as such, and showed her every mark of

contempt. The humility of the Saint triumphed over all; she excused the intentions of those who maltreated and despised her; she made herself the servant of those who would not have her for their Prioress. Accused, she kept silence; interrogated by those who had the right to do so, she replied with simplicity and humility. She became so insensible to points of honor that, whatever they said or thought of her, even in circumstances the most painful or the most unexpected, she showed an unalterable serenity. . . .

We may say that our holy Mother was perfectly humble, and that this is also why she was a model of perfect prayer, penance and zeal: "What are You doing, Lord," said she, when she was overwhelmed by Him with divine graces, "what are You doing? Have You forgotten what I am? Are You not deceiving Yourself? Your graces are ill-bestowed upon so vile a creature! . . ." It was precisely because she recognized herself so unworthy of them and referred to God all the glory, that this liberal Master took pleasure in inundating her with His favors, being assured that she would rob Him of nothing, and that this profusion of graces would turn to the advantage of her soul as well as to the glory of God.

Do we wish now for more perfect examples of humility? Let us transport ourselves to Bethlehem, to Nazareth, to Jerusalem, in a word, to all those places where Jesus and Mary have left us such admirable examples of this virtue. We shall see the most holy, the most humble of creatures, hidden in a modest apartment, attracting upon herself the complacency of the Almighty; receiving a heavenly messenger, who announces to her that a great marvel is to be operated within her: the Eternal Father has chosen her for the Mother of our Savior; the Eternal Son of the Father is going to descend into her virginal bosom and from there will show Himself to sinners and redeem them; and it is the Holy Spirit Who will operate this wonder. . . . And Mary humbles herself; she annihilates herself; she proclaims herself the handmaid of the Lord, after the glorious Archangel had just proclaimed her the Mother of God! It

was her profound humility which won for her that singular privilege of a divine and virginal maternity. The more sublime the dignity, the higher the elevation, the more perfect also becomes her abasement, the more sincere her humility. Mother of God, in all truth, she also makes herself truly the servant of this God to Whom she has always been perfectly submissive, and of men, for the salvation of whom she sacrifices herself in sacrificing her Divine Son.

What do we not read of the humility of our Lord, that Model by excellence of all virtues? He humbled Himself from the first moment of His Incarnation in the bosom of Mary, until His death on the Cross between two thieves. He willed to remain unknown, living in poverty and labor during thirty years; He manifested Himself to the multitudes during the last three years of His life, but always in the condition of a poor and humble person, living on alms, associating with the poorest among the people, the uncouth and the ignorant. If He worked miracles it was only after having invoked His Father, and to refer to Him all the glory of these prodigies. If He was called Good Master, He immediately replied: "Why do you call Me good? God alone is good." . . . He hides Himself by flight from the multitude who wished to proclaim Him King of Israel but He goes forward to meet the traitor and the armed satellites who wished to drag him before the iniquitous judges who have resolved to decree His death, after they have overwhelmed Him with outrages. Has He not sighed during His whole life for this day? Has He not called it the day of His nuptials, the day of the joy of His Heart, impatient to sacrifice itself for love of us?

He declares to His Apostles that He came, not to be served but to serve; and at the Last Supper He assumes, in truth, the role, the attitude and the office of a slave, when laying aside His outer garments He girded Himself and washed the feet of His Apostles. Immediately after this act of unheard-of abasement, wishing to show us that, not only His services, even the most humble, but also His Sacred Person, His body, His blood are ours also, He makes Himself our

nourishment, our bread, hiding His Divine Majesty under the appearance of the most common food, multiplying prodigies of His power to satisfy His thirst for annihilation, allowing Himself to be enclosed in an obscure Tabernacle and remaining there exposed to all kinds of profanations and outrages.

If, during His life, He fled from the palaces of the great, when upon the point of dying He allows Himself to be led to the dwelling of the High Priest, to the Court of Herod and to the Pretorium of the Roman Governor in order to be maltreated as a vile malefactor, scoffed at as a man convicted of insanity, or as one powerless to defend Himself; in fine, to see Himself judged more unworthy of life than Barrabas, and condemned to a torture as infamous as it was cruel. O soul! who dost consider such examples of humility, what hast thou done until now? What dost thou intend to do in order to imitate thy God thus annihilated? . . .

FOURTH POINT.

Examen.

If until now humility has not been our portion, this meditation, without doubt, will give us light to recognize the faults of which our self-love has been the cause, and we shall advance a step in the practice of this virtue. Let us, then, examine in the presence of God how we have accomplished this point of our Rule which is so important, and upon which our sanctity wholly depends; since the measure of our humility is the measure of the graces of God, and without this grace we cannot arrive at sanctity. Have we understood this well? Have we done everything in our power to become humble? Perhaps we have wished to pass for humble souls when in reality we were actuated by a more refined and criminal pride; but have we desired to be so truly, by consenting to pass in the eyes of others for what we are, that is to say, contemptible?

Have we sincerely wished to be known as we know ourselves? Assuredly we are not able to sound the

depth of our misery, and we flatter ourselves on many points which are really defective; nevertheless, what pain it costs us to manifest the little misery that we do recognize, what delays, what windings before doing so, particularly when we have reason to believe that we will be taken at our word, and that we will cause a little of that confidence, that esteem and that favor of which we are so avaricious, to be withdrawn from us! . . . We protest that we love the truth, that we wish to be taken for what we are, despised and forgotten, etc., and nevertheless, there are still in us some remains of self which seek to live in the midst of these ruins . . . ; from time to time there still arises a little hope of attracting the least compassion, of being the object of some attention, of some care.

Have we sincerely sought to put ourselves under the feet of all creatures? . . . We have, perhaps, through caprice, observed some exterior practices which seem to tend to this; but for which, no doubt, it required only a smile, a little air of disdain or haughtiness, to make us throw off our mask of humility, sometimes drawing from our lips complaints and murmurs, always, at least, provoking in the depth of our soul some discontent or ill-humor: sad indications of our susceptibility, of our delicacy in regard to points of honor. Let us acknowledge to our confusion, that we wish for humility, without real contempt; that we wish for the advantages and the honors of it without feeling its effects, that is to say, without paying that amount of abnegation and abjection which is absolutely necessary to acquire this precious treasure. . .

If we really and sincerely desired it, we would not so skilfully cover or excuse our weaknesses; and when some fault, some imperfection, escaped us in the presence of the Community, we would not seek for occasions to change the conversation to another subject which permits us to insinuate that it was through inadvertance that we failed, or that we were absorbed by some great thought to such a point as not to know what we were doing, etc. Oh! what abundant resources we use to veil or varnish over what will ex-

pose us to blame, to contempt, or to the laughter of others! . . . Oh! how we deceive ourselves, afterwards to deceive others, under the pretext of good example, of edification, etc.!

We willingly kiss the feet of our Sisters, when we believe that this will produce a good effect; but with difficulty could we support the thought that they considered us unworthy to untie the strings of their shoes! . . . We willingly call ourselves the servant of others and we offer them our services, when this will attract to us some satisfaction of self-love, but what will it not cost us to resign ourselves when others do not wish our services because they are convinced of our awkwardness, of our incapacity, and because they believe us to be useless and a burden to the Community! . . . We willingly ask to do the most painful and repugnant work, when we know that some account will be made of it; but how we revolt when we suppose that others are discharging their burdens upon us, and that they will not thank us for it. We willingly show ourselves affable, kind, obliging and devoted to persons who are not exacting, but discreet and grateful, yet what difficulty we feel in rendering a little service, or in showing a little devotedness to those whose character wounds the self-love which still lives in us! . . .

How many times have we not tried to apply ourselves to the study of ourselves, which is an indispensable work for arriving at humility, and have always recoiled, overcome by the difficulty of the enterprise, or allowed ourselves to be cast down at the sight of our misery! And yet it was not to discourage us that God gave us this knowledge of ourselves; it was to convince us that all good comes from Him, and to lead us to seek from Him the cure of our evils, the means of correcting our defects, relief in our miseries, and strength in our weakness. . . . Was not this an occasion for us to glory in our infirmities, after the example of St. Paul, that we might become strong through the grace of our Lord? Could we not then have greatly glorified this good Master by the aid which He would have granted us in our miseries?

Ah! let us acknowledge that we understand nothing of the glory of God nor of what procures it, since we take every other means for this but those to which it is necessary to have recourse.

We believe that we are glorifying God when we are satisfied with our own works, our own sentiments, our own dispositions . . . alas! it is the "ego" which is there to take its share of the profit, if it does not sometimes take the whole. We are not willing to understand that when we find ourselves in a state incapable of any good, when everything seems to us contrary to what it ought to be, when we see the tableau of our miseries unfold itself before our eyes, without any refuge for self-love, we will not understand, I say, that it is then that we can most efficaciously procure the glory of God by humbling ourselves, annihilating ourselves, having recourse to God with confidence, never allowing ourselves to do our own will, doing all we can, and counting upon God for the rest.

Have we fled from praise, applause, and honor? We have said, perhaps, that we did not desire them, whence then comes that interior ill-humor which we feel in seeing others elevated, upon hearing certain persons praised? Those researches to find out the motives for the preference which is shown them, that stiffness, that affectation in tone of voice and manner which we use towards them?

If we had received the same testimonies of esteem, of affection, of confidence and of respect which have been given to others; if certain honorable employments had been confided to us, we should have said that we were very unworthy, very incapable, and very detached from all these things; but when we are put aside and others are preferred, do we preserve the same sentiments, is it with the same serenity, the same peace, and is self as much at its ease? Alas! the more I force myself to say and to testify that I am insensible to points of honor, the more I disclose that little canker worm of self-love which is agitated in my bosom; the more I try to show an open countenance

during deceptions of this kind, the more I display to others the worthlessness of that which clothes self-love. The soul who is truly humble does not make so much noise, nor say so many things; she remains in her place, happy to be there, without wishing others to occupy themselves with her, without caring about that which passes away, and not even thinking that others are trying or humbling her. And this is why she thinks that everything is well done. Are we in this state?

Why those remarks about the proceedings of others in our regards? Why those returns upon self? Those unquiet glances at ourselves and at others, to find out if we are raised or lowered in their esteem? Why that trouble, that agitation, those efforts to retain the little shred of reputation which we seem about to lose? Why those vain reasonings upon the conduct of our Superiors, that unquiet research into their intentions, into the motives which make them act and which we interpret in our own way, concluding that they mean this or that? . . . When, then, shall we enjoy that repose, that peace promised by our Lord to those who learn at His school how to become meek and humble of heart? . . . No; humility is anything but perfect in us when we are agitated and troubled, when we are wanting in mildness, patience and resignation in interior trials: such as dryness, darkness, etc.; when we allow ourselves to be disconcerted at seeing another preferred; finally, when we are not very glad to disappear from the sight and remembrance of others. How many lights are here which show us that this virtue of humility is wanting to us!

Has our conduct towards our neighbor been that of a true servant? Of how many moments have we robbed them, to employ this time for our own use, our own little interests, and to obey our own inclinations, our tastes, etc., instead of exercising ourselves in works of charity which are within our reach, such as, working for the support of others; rendering them services when occasions are offered; consoling, strengthening and aiding souls, and sacrificing ourselves for their good, if we have care of them; praying,

suffering, renouncing ourselves to draw upon our neighbor graces of salvation and of perfection; being ready to perform the most painful labor so as to spare others; wishing to be always the most badly provided for in all things; finally, requiring for ourselves no consideration, no service, of any kind whatsoever, for such is the condition of a servant. What does my conscience say in regard to all this? If it is upright it will tell me that I have been more often mistress than servant; that I have exacted services and attentions oftener than I have rendered them; it will tell me that in what I have done for my neighbor there has been more vanity, more self-seeking, more natural inclination, than true humility; it will tell me that my devotedness has been neither generous nor disinterested, since I have counted upon the wages of gratitude, benevolence, affection and, perhaps, of praises!

Is all my time, my labor, my talents, of whatever nature they may be, my health and my life, at the service of my neighbor, as are those of a good and faithful servant in regard to his masters? Ah! if we had always had present to our mind the teachings and the example of Him Who came to serve, although He was Master of all creatures, our conduct would have been more conformable to His. . . . If we had willed in good earnest to acquire a knowledge of the truth, we should, without any difficulty, have made ourselves servants in reality and not only in appearance or pretence. Ah! let us beg of God to enlighten us that we may know what He is and what we are; and that this knowledge may cause us to attain the perfection of humility, and, with it, the perfection of charity. Amen!

CHAPTER SIXTEENTH.

Text: *In like manner do you, brethren, humbly honor your Prior, considering not him, but in his person Christ who placed him over you and who has said to the prelates of the Church, "He that heareth you heareth Me, and he that despiseth you despiseth Me," that you may not be brought into judgment for contempt, but rather by obedience merit the reward of eternal life.*

FIRST POINT.

If humility is necessary in those who govern Religious Communities, it is not less so in those who are governed. If humility is so excellent that it gives to Superiors the virtues required for governing well, with it inferiors also have the virtues necessary for being directed and governed according to the Spirit of God and conformable to His Divine Will.

And do you, brethren, humbly honor your Prior. A truly humble soul puts itself beneath all creatures, recognizing that this is its place; it is not then difficult for him to honor his Superior or to submit to his guidance. The inferior must be humble in order to honor his Superior as this point of our Rule prescribes. He ought to honor him, not for what he is in himself, but because he is the representative of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the honor that he renders him has nothing in it that is natural or human. It is not because of his talents, his amiability, his polished manner, his high birth, his knowledge, his personal qualities, etc., for very often these qualities are wanting to him; and when we regard him with human eyes we find him, perhaps, only a personage of very mediocre talents, little worthy of honor for what he is in himself; it may even happen that certain inferiors are more advantageously endowed in these different respects.

Nevertheless, a Superior ought to be honored by all. Now, I defy an inferior who is not humble, or who does not wish to become so, to have enough of the spirit of faith to honor sincerely one whom he believes unworthy of it and to whom he finds himself superior in regard to talents and personal merit; I defy this inferior to be perfectly submissive to his Superior, as he would be to God, if He showed Himself in Person and spoke to him; again, I defy him to be able to submit his judgment to his Su-

perior, for he will always have some pretext for believing that he sees things more clearly and understands them better. And, nevertheless, the duty of a good inferior is to honor his Superior as he would honor our Lord Himself, and to submit to him as to God Himself, to enter into his views, and to identify his will with his. Now all this cannot be done without humility.

Yes, without humility we can honor a person commendable for his personal qualities; we can submit to a person whom we love, whom we esteem, and from whom we expect some return; we can submit our judgment to a person gifted with good sense, profound knowledge and of well recognized sanctity; but without humility we cannot do it as perfectly as the Religious spirit requires, in regard to a person who does not unite within himself all these advantages and all these qualities.

Even were he perfect in all these respects, as far at least as one can be perfect here below, it will always be true, to say that without humility one will always find a thousand pretexts, a thousand reasons for not honoring his Superior and for not submitting to him his judgment and his will. Self-love is so skilful in making us find vices in the virtues of others, in perceiving defects where there are none, in attaching us to our own opinions and making us prefer our own judgment to that of another, particularly where our personal interests are concerned!

Complete self-abnegation, which is the perfection of humility of heart, alone can lead us to honor those who govern us in the Name of God, and to submit our judgment and our will to theirs. An inferior without humility reasons about all things, according to his own thoughts and his own human views; he not only will see in his Superior what he is in himself, but the spirit of pride will also falsify his judgment so that he will see him to be less than he really is. From this proceeds a conduct altogether opposed to that which our holy Rule prescribes. The inferior who is humble makes use of his judgment and his reason only to persuade himself that the supreme reason by which he ought to guide himself is God and the Will of God; that God having said to Superiors that whosoever hears them hears Him and that whosoever despises them despises Him, since they hold His place here on earth, the best way to honor

God, to know and accomplish His Will, is to submit his reason to faith, to impose silence upon his own judgment and to act towards his Superior as he would wish to act towards God, if he were under His immediate direction. And from this follows a conduct altogether conformable to what our holy Rule intends when it says: *Do you brethren, humbly honor your Prior.*

Let us remark well these words: *Humbly honor* If a mediocre virtue had been sufficient, it would not have been said to us: *Humbly honor*; which proves that it is a perfect humility which is required for the accomplishment of our duties towards our Superiors. This being so, let us strive to acquire the perfection of this sublime virtue in order to honor our Superiors, first in their person, by considering them with the eyes of faith as the representatives of God; in the second place, submitting our mind and judgment, seeing things as they wish us to see them; and lastly, let us render them honor by our prompt, blind, universal and joyous obedience.

All our duties towards them are reduced to three heads, the theory of which is developed by all the Masters of the spiritual life, and the practice of which ought to conduct us to a very high degree of sanctity, as our holy Rule promises us by these words which terminate its exhortation: *That by obedience you may merit the reward of eternal life* Hence it follows that a perfectly humble inferior who honors his Superior by exterior testimonies which our regular customs prescribe, and by the entire submission of his will and his judgment, merits the crown of glory promised to the good and faithful servant who will have rendered himself great in the sight of God by his fidelity to little things.

These considerations should lead us to a study of the practical means which are proper to make us acquit ourselves exactly of all our duties towards the person who holds in our regard the place of God. Before all things we ought to convince ourselves that God is hidden in this person just as He is hidden in a Tabernacle whether it be of common or of precious wood, of marble, of silver or of gold. When we prostrate ourselves before an altar, it is not the altar that we honor but the God Who is hidden there for love of us.. Even though, which God forbid, our Superiors may be little worthy of honor in them-

selves, we should not fail to render them the honor due to the God Whom they represent.

It has always been known in Carmel, that an inferior who lives by faith sees God alone in the person of his Superior; and submits his judgment and will to him in all things that are not contrary to the divine law. This is why this good and perfect inferior always shows himself exact in saluting his Superior with respect when he meets him, kneeling when he speaks or listens to him, and remaining in his presence with a respectful and modest countenance. When he is reproved he is faithful to prostrate without reply or excuse, unless he be constrained to do so by obedience; he is silent when his Superior speaks, he respects not only his person, but all that relates to him or that is in his use, as is laid down in our holy regulations. He keeps a respectful silence concerning all his actions, all his orders, his manner, his weaknesses; he forestalls him in all things, he renders him a thousand little services, which are a testimony of his respect, his affection, his gratitude and the esteem he has for the representative of God. In a word, in all his relations with him, one recognizes that he acts from motives of faith, honoring God hidden in the creature.

To accomplish perfectly this point of the Rule, a truly humble child of Carmel does not content himself with these exterior marks of honor which are to be shown to his Superior, he honors him also in his mind and with his will. Hence it follows that such a soul has no other views, no other thoughts than those which have been approved of by his Superior; he submits all things to him and judges of nothing himself, for thus is he certain of acting according to the Spirit of God, and not according to his own. Here again, the spirit of faith alone can make us see things in a manner contrary to what we naturally see them to be; to believe a thing to be right when our own judgment tells us it is wrong; and to accept that which is repugnant to our natural reason. God speaks through the organ of him of whom He has said: *He who heareth you heareth Me*; and that suffices . . .

Moreover, an humble inferior submits his will to his Superior in such a manner that he knows not how to have any other. It is sufficient for him to know this will to believe that it can be executed and he at once puts his

hand to the work. We obey badly when the spirit of faith is wanting; it then seems impossible, or at least very difficult, to accomplish what obedience prescribes. Ah! we do not know of what an obedient soul is capable! . . . We judge of everything according to human views, we follow our inclinations and our repugnances; then we say: "I cannot do such a thing" . . . The truly obedient soul forms no judgments, makes no calculations. God speaks: he needs nothing more to convince him that it is possible to execute his orders, since God commands nothing that is above our strength, nothing that He does not give us the grace to accomplish. Besides, even supposing that God does not see fit to give him this supernatural supply of strength, he knows that He will, at least, take into account the good will and the efforts which he will have shown in the undertaking.

It is impossible for us to develop in one Meditation all that concerns the renunciation of the will and the judgment, and the obligation of submitting them perfectly, in a spirit of faith, to those whom we regard, whom we justly honor as the very representatives of God. But what we can say and what we ought to stop to consider is, that all our perfection depends upon this double renunciation. God is perfection: the more we unite ourselves to Him the more perfect we become. Now, to unite ourselves to God, our will and our judgment should not be in opposition to His Divine Will and to His adorable designs; and it is this which causes obedience, when it is rendered in a spirit of faith, to unite our will to the Will of God on every occasion, without listening to the pretexts of self-love which tries always to satisfy itself by robbing God of some act of renunciation or of obedience.

Let us labor to put self aside and to see God in those who govern us, in order to conform our views to theirs, to have no other judgment, no other will than theirs, in great as well as in little things; without reasoning, without delay, with restriction, but with a greatness of soul, generosity, a joyous heart, entire abandonment and perfect love. Thus we shall honor the representatives of God and secure our own perfection and salvation.

"It is certain," say our holy Mother St. Teresa, "that sovereign perfection does not consist in interior consola-

tions and great raptures, nor in visions and the spirit of prophecy, but it consists in having our will so conformable to the Will of God that as soon as we shall recognize that He desires something of us we desire it likewise with all our heart, and receive what is bitter from His hand with as much joy as what is delightful." Our holy Mother afterwards proves that the surest way of attaining to this perfection is obedience, since our own lights deceive us, and our own will draws us away when we do not take care to subject it, and since our enemies league themselves against us to persuade us that such and such things are according to God's Will, whereas they are not.

This great Saint adds: "As in a lawsuit, the issue of which is doubtful, we take an arbitrator into whose hands both parties, weary of pleading their cause, give up all their rights to constitute him the judge: so, in spiritual affairs, when the soul is ignorant of the Will of God, we should address ourselves to our Superior with a firm resolution of no longer pleading or thinking of our own cause, but of giving ourselves up to all that he will decide or ordain. In this manner we shall know and infallibly accomplish the Will of God, without running the risk of deceiving ourselves, our Lord having assured us that He speaks to us by the mouth of our Superiors, and that it is He Whom we hear when we hear them . . ."

See, then, what our holy Mother St. Teresa thought, she to whom our Lord Himself spoke, and who only obeyed Him according to the advice of His representatives upon earth, because she knew that illusion, which is always to be feared in extraordinary ways, cannot be found in obedience, when it is accomplished in a spirit of faith. God has said so; our holy Rule recalls it to our minds; it is an incontestable truth; let us then believe it and act according to this belief, in order to secure our salvation by the obedience which we render to our Superiors.

We should not end this Meditation without testifying our gratitude to God for having given us so sure, so infallible a means of knowing His Will in all things, and of accomplishing it for His greater glory. We are a thousand times more happy than so many other souls who, given up to themselves, to their own will, are without an immediate Superior to direct them, but who, nevertheless,

desirous of their sanctification, strive to know and to accomplish the Divine Will! They are never certain that their enterprises, their actions or their thoughts are comfortable to the Will of God; and this doubt alone suffices to embitter the happiness of such souls, and prevents them from tasting the peace of God, even when they find pleasure in serving Him. When this doubt is once removed by submission to a Superior, the soul is at liberty, it is in peace, whatever may be its state, whatever dryness, disgust or aridity it may feel. . . . May God then be blessed a thousand times for permitting us to taste this peace!

But to possess it in its plentitude, it is necessary that our obedience should be entire, that we should consider God alone in the person of our Superiors and in their conduct towards us. This is the opinion of St. Bernard who, after having proved that Superiors are the guardians of truth and that it is from them that we are to receive the law, because they are the ministers of God appointed to govern us, continues thus: "But of what law, of what commandment think you the Holy Spirit speaks? There is no question here of an order which is expressly given us in the sacred pages, or which an evident reason obliges us to observe. For orders of this nature we do not expect them to command or forbid them. No, the Holy Spirit speaks of certain doubtful things in which we cannot evidently recognize the Will of God until our Superiors, who are the depositaries of this Will, have declared it. In things which are not manifestly contrary to His law, we should then listen to him who is a visible God to us, and whom we should honor as such, as we listen to God Himself."

It is this spirit of faith which should animate a true child of the Order, and which should animate us in our relations with our Superiors, that our conduct, both as to the exterior and to the interior, may be such as our holy Rule intends.

SECOND POINT.

It is easy to understand that the perfect practice of the point of the Rule upon which we now meditate ought to establish and strengthen in us the spirit of penance and of mortification. We cannot perfectly acquit ourselves of

our duties towards those whom God has placed over us to govern us in His Name, without it operating in us a sort of destruction of the life of nature; and it is precisely towards this that mortification tends. To submit one's judgment; to subject one's will to a person who, perhaps, is inferior to ourselves in many respects; to discover to her all the movements of our soul, even those the most humiliating and which will make us known in a manner painful and prejudicial to self-love, is not all this capable of causing the death of the "ego" by continual acts of mortification which strengthen the superior part of the soul and accustom it to live only by this nourishment?

A true Religious ought, in truth, to be dead to his own will by the practice of perfect submission and supernatural obedience to his Superiors. Whether he prays, works, or rests, his will ought to have no part, no satisfaction in it; dead to all, he should live only through obedience. He may then say in truth with St. Paul: "I live now not I, but Christ liveth in me"; that is to say, it is not my own life that makes me act, that gives me movement; it is not my own will that I accomplish, but that of God which is manifested to me by obedience. Is not this the life of Jesus Christ in us? According to a great Saint, the life of a Religious is passed in doing that which he wills not and in never doing that which he wills. . . . What food for the spirit of penance and mortification! . . .

Do we not also find in this wherewith to nourish the spirit of prayer and union with God? We are full of evil inclinations; our judgment and our will wish to be heard and obeyed; all within us is in continual opposition to that dependence which the Religious life requires. The perfection of this dependence being above our natural strength, it is necessary, then, in order to attain it, to have recourse to the supernatural strength which we only obtain by asking for it. Hence, the necessity of prayer to obtain from the Heart of God the aid of which we have need. . . . On the other hand, the life of obedience and of total dependence, by destroying in us our own life, rids us of all that could be an object of distraction in prayer, and renders us more capable of this holy exercise: because the faculties of the soul become more free to occupy themselves with the things of God and to converse with Him.

Finally, a life of obedience, uniting our mind and will to that of our Superiors, unites us at the same time to God, to His Spirit and to His Will. If then we wish to know the degree of our union with God, we shall discover it by the measure of our dependence and submission towards those who hold for us His place upon earth. If we are united to them in our thoughts, our views and our actions, then these same ties unite us to God. If we still show some reserve upon this point, if we still have some attachment to our own judgment, if our union with our Superiors is imperfect, then our union with God is equally so.

Moreover, all the marks of honors, of submission and of respect which we render to our Superiors in a spirit of faith, maintain within us the spirit of prayer and divine union. Our heart salutes the Most High when our body inclines before His representatives; our heart honors Him, thanks Him, consults Him, obeys Him, pleases Him when we do these things towards our Superior in a spirit of faith; all this unites us to God and keeps us in an habitual exercise of love towards Him. If obedience becomes painful, our heart will immediately turn towards our Lord to accept and to will what He wills; it humbles itself in feeling still so many repugnances, it renounces them; it begs for an equal measure of love and of generosity; and relying upon the divine aid, it accomplishes the act of obedience without murmuring and without human views concerning the person who commands it. If in certain circumstances our own judgment wishes to assert itself, the heart at once looks towards its God and says lovingly to Him: "Can it be possible, O my Master, that I wish to prefer my judgment to Thine, and that, through attachment to my own views, I wish to separate myself from Thee? No; it shall not be thus; I am but blindness, so I allow myself to be guided by Thee; I give myself up to Thy guidance. I believe what Thou dost say to me through the organ of Thy representative. 'He who heareth you heareth Me,' Thou hast said to him. Speak then, Lord: my soul hears Thee and it will obey Thee with the aid of Thy grace . . ." See how the spirit of prayer is vivified and exercised by the practice of this point of the Rule.

The spirit of zeal also has an advantage here; for we

know that zeal, tainted with self-will, is false and inefficacious. The efficacy of zeal, on the contrary, depends upon the humility and the dependence with which it is exercised; if we entwine, so to speak, zeal with these two virtues, it is then good and bears fruit.

A Religious soul who honors her Superiors, who practises to the letter and with an interior spirit what our customs prescribe in their regard, who obeys them perfectly, who submits her judgment and her will to them in all things, who renders them an account, as exact as it is faithful, of her interior; a soul who permits herself neither words, actions nor gestures ever so little contrary to the respect and the regard due to legitimate authority; a soul, in fine, who sees God alone in His representatives, exercises by this conduct a very efficacious zeal which greatly glorifies God. She diffuses around her an odor of sanctity which edifies more than could the most beautiful discourses, more than exhortations well conceived and well delivered, and more than all other exercises to which zeal could give itself.

On the other hand, a Religious soul who, mistrusting her own lights, submits her thoughts, her views, her desires, to legitimate authority in regard to the zeal which she wishes to exercise for the glory of God and the good of souls, puts herself in a state capable of receiving advice and salutary counsel; this act of humility obtains for her lights and graces efficacious for the success of these enterprises, to which she devotes herself in all confidence, feeling sustained by obedience which is for her the expression of the Divine Will. Our holy Constitutions direct that no Religious should reprimand another without an order from the Prioress; those who, to maintain regularity, have care of noticing the faults committed, cannot make any remonstrances; but they tell the Prioress what they have seen, that she may decide what is suitable to be said or done for the particular as well as for the general good; and why is this? Because the Prioress holds the place of God and she alone can communicate to the Monitress the divine orders.

What trouble, what agitation there would be in a Religious house if each one permitted herself the liberty of observing the others and of reprimanding them according to her impressions and personal views, without having the

grace for this? . . . Her zeal would have results altogether contrary to those which she proposed to herself; instead of re-establishing order she would cause disorder; while, by taking the counsel of the Prioress, she receives from her light and direction to do some good to souls. A simple Religious may often see some fault in an action which is very innocent in itself; she is ignorant of the time and of the manner in which to approach the one who committed the fault, in such a way as to do her good; but the Prioress has special light for this; by having recourse to her with submission we are sure of attaining the end we propose.

Let us then be united in will and in mind to our Prioress; let us honor her by our respect, our dependence, our confidence, and our love. Thus shall we detach ourselves from ourselves; our prayers will ascend more directly to God; we will be united to Him on all occasions; in fine, our zeal will be efficacious, and will contribute to His glory as well as to the good of souls. Let us not forget that God, hidden in the person of our Superiors, considers as given to Himself the marks of honor and of submission which are given to them. Let us tremble if we do not honor them as we ought.

THIRD POINT.

Examples.

Our Blessed Sister Mary of the Incarnation, Foundress of Carmel in France, was a woman of great sanctity and had a mind capable of conducting successfully the greatest enterprises tending to the glory of God. The holiest and the most distinguished personages of her time were glad to take counsel from this very humble soul who had willed to assume in our holy Order the condition of a Lay Sister. She showed admirable submission to all those who had any authority over her. She saw God, and not the creature, in all persons clothed with the authority of Prioress, whatever might otherwise be their merit. Thus her own daughter, becoming her Prioress, could count in all things upon her submission and dependence.

They could employ her or set her aside, consult her or act without her counsel, she was indifferent, because she saw only the guidance of God in all these things. She was so convinced that God was present in legitimate au-

thority that she said if she saw hell on one side and on the other a thought against her Prioress, she would prefer to precipitate herself into hell rather than consent to this thought. M. Duval, one of our first Superiors, had ordered her to listen to the Religious of her Community who wished to speak to her of their interior dispositions; but at the end of some time the Prioress having, in her turn, forbidden her to do so, the humble and obedient Religious conformed to these different orders with equal submission, recognizing in them the Will of God and not that of creatures.

She had the greatest respect for Ecclesiastical Superiors, and she gave them sincere testimonies of this. Cardinal de Gondy having refused her a permission, she approved of his refusal and no longer thought of what she had asked him. In another circumstance she blamed the conduct of one of her relatives who established an Institute for young ladies contrary to the wish of her Superiors. "Her project," she said, "cannot succeed, for it is not supported by obedience; this virtue should be the basis of all enterprises useful to the Church . . ."

The Chronicles of our Order relate that the Religious of the Convent of Pastrana practised this point of the Rule with great perfection. Their maxim, in theory and in practice, was that the voice of Superior is the voice of Jesus Christ, and that we should promptly execute the commands received by rising above all difficulties. This spirit of faith rendered their obedience so perfect that there could rarely be found among them faults of this kind to correct. See how the first fault remarked was punished.

A Lay Brother having fallen ill, the Infirmarian judged proper to prepare for him a concoction of certain purgative herbs. The sick Brother was troubled because this remedy had neither been prescribed by the physician nor prepared at the apothecary, and he made some difficulty about taking it. This being made known, the Superior wished to cure the spiritual weakness of this poor Brother by an example of the submission of the other Religious. For this reason he commanded that the concoction should be increased and that all should take it in the presence of the sick Brother, who was thus greatly confused. The Infirmarian having distributed the remedy to all, saw

enter a Brother whose work had delayed him, and going at once presented him with a cup of this tea. A little surprised, but not disconcerted, he said: My Brother, if you give me this beverage for my health, God be praised! for, by His grace, I do not need it." "This is not my purpose," replied the Infirmarian; "I only intend by this to do what I have been commanded." The fervent Religious then took the cup and drank its contents even to the last drop.

The Prior of this edifying Community recognized in his brethren so much submission and so great a contempt for the lights of their own judgment, that he was constrained to weigh his words in the orders as well as in the permissions which he gave; for these perfectly obedient souls took everything to the letter and responded in all things to the call of authority, without stopping to consider if the thing was to the purpose, or if it was not above their strength: to them, as we have already said, their Superior was their visible God.

The Carmelites of the Convent of Malagon, founded by our holy Mother St. Teresa, have also left us great examples of obedience and of the spirit of faith. A Religious being very sick and given up by the physician, asked the Prioress permission to die, that she might do nothing without obedience. The Prioress having refused it, the Religious remained during some time in the same state bordering on agony. Feeling at last pressed with the desire of going to her God, she begged anew permission to die, and rendered her last sigh at the very moment when the Prioress pronounced the last syllable of this authorization.

It happened one day that there was no more bread in the house to give to a sick Sister. Notwithstanding this, the Prioress commanded a Novice to go and get two loaves from the pantry; she went at once but returned saying that she could find none. The Prioress then directed her to return and not to fail this time to bring her the bread. The Novice went back in a spirit of lively faith, and there she found two small loaves of delicious bread with which they relieved the sick Sister; and this miracle contributed greatly to perfect in this Carmel the virtue of obedience and the spirit of faith.

Father Elias of St. Martin, being Prior of the Convent

of Alcala, the cook, named Brother James of Jesus, came to tell him that his whole provision of oil consisted of a very small quantity which he had drained from the dregs of a vessel which had formerly contained it. The Superior, too poor to bear a like expense at that time, and wishing to try the faith of the good Brother, said to him: "Go, my Brother, the little quantity of oil which remains to you will suffice to provide for the wants of the Community; only have confidence and nothing will be wanting to you." This true child of obedience received the command as if it had come from God Himself. He at once began to employ the oil of his little pot freely for cooking purposes as well as for the lamps of the house, which lamps amounted to the number of sixty; and they continued to draw from it without being more sparing, and not with less success, from the eighteenth of October until the twenty-fifth of December.

What examples has not our holy Mother St. Teresa left us of the virtue of obedience and the spirit of faith! God often spoke to her in a manner clear and precise; and notwithstanding this she never acted until legitimate authority had spoken; sometimes she even refrained from making known her revelations to her Superiors, in order that they might not be influenced by what she could have made known to them. If their decision was opposed to her revelations she listened only to the voice of obedience and waited until our Lord had disposed her Superiors to revoke their decision and to enter into the designs which had been revealed to her.

Our holy Father St. John of the Cross saw God alone in the person of his Superiors; whence flowed that perfect obedience to orders the most painful, that submission, that heroic patience in the midst of the most unjust treatment to which he was subjected. Never did a complaint or a murmur come from his lips, and he always showed himself a true child of obedience. Whatever might be their conduct in his regard he submitted equally to all his Superiors, considering neither their person nor their character, but seeing in their orders the Will of God; so that he went to prison with as much submission as he went anywhere else . . .

What shall we say of the spirit of faith of the most holy Virgin? Although God has sent to her a heavenly

messenger to reveal His great designs over her, yet this humble and obedient Virgin knew how to recognize the Will of her Sovereign Master in the orders of him who had been given to her as a Superior, although he was inferior to her in the order of grace. Our Father St. Joseph had only to say a word for Mary to obey immediately. Was it necessary, in the depths of winter, to undertake a painful journey? Notwithstanding the reasons which she could well have alleged, Mary does not dispense herself, she obeys; God wills it; He will know how to provide for all: this is the thought which animates and sustains her. A little later our Father St. Joseph makes known to her the order received from Heaven to fly into Egypt with the Holy Child Jesus. It is in the middle of the night; without any preparation or resources for the journey, without any knowledge of the way or of the country where it is necessary to go; they know not how they shall live there, how long a time they shall remain, in a word, it is a departure unforeseen, precipitate, made in complete ignorance of the consequences and of the result of the journey, nevertheless, Mary says not a word: the representative of God has spoken; the order is precise; she takes the Holy Infant Jesus and departs without reasoning, without delay, without inquietude. She knows that God will accomplish His work without it being necessary to mingle human prudence with it; for very often such prudence places obstacles in the way of God's designs over us, if we do not act with a spirit of faith and in blind obedience to those who hold His place in our regard.

Our Lord, the perfect model of all virtues, is offered to us as a pattern of obedience, particularly in His hidden life at Nazareth. The Holy Gospel tells us: "He was subject" to Joseph and Mary; "He increased in wisdom, in age and in grace before God and man." Can the Religious soul who contemplates this Divine Model, dare to excuse her reasonings upon the orders of obedience, her attachment to her own judgment, her want of a spirit of faith and of submission to her Superiors, whom she considers according to what they are in themselves rather than as the representatives of God? What excuse can she offer in seeing the Son of God, the Eternal Wisdom, the Worker of divine marvels, abase Himself down to

the state of infancy, clothing Himself exteriorly with weakness, want and entire dependence? . . .

He received, like a docile child, the lessons of those who, by the order of His heavenly Father, were His Superiors. He, the God of all knowledge, learns to handle the tools of a poor carpenter; He allows His little hand to be directed in the work which His divine Mother and His foster-father teach Him! . . . I hear Him first lisp, then speak, like other children; I see Him take His first steps, listen and ask questions, as if He could not learn of Himself what was taught Him! "He grew in wisdom, in age and in grace". Thus He showed exteriorly, like other children, only weak beginnings; He withheld His knowledge, His understanding, His wisdom, in order to make progress in the eyes of men, conformably to the natural order and to obey His heavenly Father . . .

FOURTH POINT.

Examen.

After having considered the practice of this point of the Rule in the conduct of some holy souls who have gone before us, and being of our own Religious family are more capable of benefiting us; after having admired it in the conduct of the Mother of God and of her Divine Son, we must now place ourselves in the presence of these models and examine where we stand in this respect, seeing if we walk in a good way or in paths where we might go astray. If necessary to retrace our steps, we still have time; if we have faults with which to reproach ourselves, we can yet repair them.

Let us not delude ourselves; let us see things according to the truth; whatever we may discover, this light will always be useful to us and will procure the glory of God. If we have until now badly understood and badly practised this point of our Rule, we shall do penance for it with humility and confidence; we shall implore the help of grace in order to do better for the future: we shall labor to correct ourselves, and with the help of God we shall succeed. If, on the contrary, all goes well with us, we shall thank our Lord for it; we shall praise and bless Him a thousand times because He has aided us so efficaciously with His grace; and we shall conjure Him to continue His assistance that we may avoid the misfortune

of ending badly after having begun well, which will infallibly happen to us if our Lord leaves us a little to ourselves.

How have I honored the person of my Superiors? Have I testified my respect for them on all occasions? Have I faithfully observed what our customs prescribe in their regard, such as stopping to salute the Prioress when we meet her, speaking to her kneeling, prostrating when she reproves or praises us, keeping silence when she speaks, and never interrupting her? . . . Have I done all this in a spirit of faith, without considering her person, but seeing God alone in her? In this same spirit have I kissed the scapular of the Prioress in receiving from her or in giving to her some object? Have I reverently made all the inclinations which the Ceremonial prescribes in her regard, in Choir and at other Community Acts? Have I respected those things of which she makes use?

Have I forbidden myself all remarks, all reflections upon her manner of acting, her particular methods, or the whole of her conduct? How many times, by regarding her with human eyes, have I noticed in her defects, imperfections and miseries, which have rendered my submission imperfect, greatly weakened the sentiments of respect which I ought to have had for her, and exposed myself to sad temptations! . . . How many times also, when my human eyes considered her personal qualities, her talents or her agreeable exterior, have I attached myself to her person by an affection more natural than religious: so that the marks of affection and of honor which I gave her were no longer addressed to God but to the creature! . . .

Have not these same human views made me seek her affection with eagerness, trouble and disquietude? Have I not felt myself offended at some proceeding on her part which I believed to be a want of confidence, of esteem and of affection for me? Then what irregularity in my conduct in her regard, according to these different impressions! I have failed in that respect which is due to her, at one time by ill-humor, at another by excessive familiarity: I avoided meeting her and speaking to her on one day, only to fatigue her the next by my useless visits and my extravagant testimonies of affection: in some cir-

cumstance I reasoned, I received badly her remonstrances and counsels, in another I received them in a dissipated and light manner

What profit have I drawn from my intercourse with those in authority? Alas! it has been almost nothing, on account of this want of the spirit of faith. I have not seen God in my Prioress: I have neither sought Him nor desired Him, therefore I have found only the creature, with all the miseries inseparable from it. God could not receive the testimonies of affection which were not addressed to Him: He has not felt Himself bound to give me His favors since I only asked them of the creature; thus I have remained poor in His graces which are so necessary to become a good Religious, and I am found deprived of all strength and light on occasions when I have need of them! Would it have been so if my intercourse with my Prioress had been more pure, and if I had gone to her in a spirit of faith and perfect simplicity, as to God Himself?

Under the pretext of foreseeing the directions of my Superiors in order to execute them, have I not sought to guess their intentions and to scrutinize with curiosity the motives which led them to act in such and such a manner? Have I not allowed myself to be tempted and troubled by this preoccupation? This is not a right understanding of obedience. For example, if my Prioress has given me to understand that she desires to see me do a thing in such a manner rather than in another, although she does not formally declare it I ought to act as if she had ordered it to be done and not dispense myself from it by saying, in order to excuse myself: "I am not obliged to do that in such a manner; Our Mother did not tell me to do it; I do not know what she means." No, this would be an evasion contrary to the spirit of faith and to that true submission which is due to Superiors.

Our holy Father St. John of the Cross tells us in his Precautions: "Never look upon your Superior, be he who he may, otherwise than if you were looking upon God Himself, in Whose place he stands. Keep a careful watch upon yourself in this regard, and do not reflect upon the character, manner, conversation, or habits of your Superior. If you do you will injure yourself, and

you will change your obedience from divine into human . . .” Does not this often happen to me when, through a want of the spirit of faith, I give myself willingly to acts of obedience which flatter self-love and are enjoined upon me in a gracious and amiable manner, with a secret hope of thus rendering myself agreeable to my Prioress and of attracting to myself her affection? . . .

And it would be so easy for me to have relations only with Thee, O my God! by means of obedience and the spirit of faith! . . . In my life of dependence, in little things as well as in great, I should at each moment be able to say with joy that it is Thee whom I obey; that I accomplish Thy Will; since it is Thy good pleasure which is manifested to me by my Prioress and the other Mothers and Sisters who have the right to command me. Yes, my life could easily be entirely for Thee, O my God! if I knew how to employ it thus.

But, alas! how far am I from walking in this path! How many reasonings about things commanded! According to my way of thinking, all is without a purpose, all is out of time. I think that this one does not know how to direct me, that that one fatigues me by the multiplicity of her orders; this other seems to me to have no compassion nor regard for their companions in office, etc.; in a word, nothing goes on well except what pleases nature or satisfies my self-love. By looking at all things with the eyes of faith, the same persons and things make a very different impression upon me: my soul is enlarged, nothing offends me; I go simply where I am sent; I do without reasoning what I am told to do; difficulties are smoothed away; strength is given me in abundance; I receive special graces to repress temptations and to surmount my repugnances.

How great, then, is the difference in my conduct, according to the manner in which I look upon those in authority! Oh! how ill at ease I am when I see myself in dependence to a creature! How hard it is for me to renounce my own will to submit to her! How I struggle to shake off a yoke which seems to me tyrannical! How burdensome Community life appears! . . . Ah! it were better, indeed, not to have embraced it, this all-divine Religious life, rather than to pervert it to the ex-

tent of feeling only its thorns without having either the profit, the merit, or the enjoyment of it! But since God has done me the favor of calling me to it, I wish to enter into His designs; I will destroy all that obscures my faith, that is to say, egotism and attachment to my own judgment.

When, at times, I have wished to live a true life of faith, the basis of the whole Religious life, have I not been happy and at liberty? Did the yoke of the Lord then appear heavy to me? Did I seek to shake it off? What peace in my spiritual exercises, in prayer and at Holy Communion, etc.! What calmness in the midst of little changes made in the offices, in habits, in occupations, even upon the occasion of a change of Prioress! . . . God being all in all to me, nothing of all that passes away could trouble the peace and serenity of my soul

Let us then, henceforth, know how to elevate ourselves, by faith, above human views and considerations, to dwell always in those pure regions of the divine life which is found in Religion when we allow ourselves to be guided by obedience.

CONSIDERATIONS

Upon the Words by Which

St. Albert Terminates Our Holy Rule.

Text: These points we have briefly written to you, appointing a Rule for your institute, according to which you will be obliged to live. If any one chooses to do more than is herein prescribed, our Lord, when He comes to judge, will reward him; let him, however, use discretion, which is the rule of all virtues.

It seems to me that I see resumed in these few words: first, our happiness of living under a Rule which comes from God and which leads us to Him; secondly, the love we ought to have for this Rule, and the fervor with which we should practise it; thirdly, and lastly, the limits which it is necessary to prescribe to our fervor in regard to the practices of supererogation of the Rule. These three points will give us an occasion for making some reflections, useful for the practical perfection of our holy observances.

FIRST POINT.

First, it is a great happiness to live under a Rule which comes from God and which leads us to Him. We must have appreciated this happiness while meditating upon our Rule, which contains within a few pages the highest perfection to which man can pretend to aspire here below; which shows us, in a few words, the royal and sure way which leads to the divine union; which in fine, by its practice has formed Saints of the highest order. Yes, we must have appreciated our happiness of living under this Rule, which is at once sublime in its simplicity, extensive in its brevity, and rich in means of perfection and of sanctity. In the course of these Meditations, the special lights with which our Lord has favored us, have made us discover the divine meaning contained in each word of the Rule and its evangelical spirit, so proper to conduct us to the summit of perfection. Each one of its points has furnished us abundantly with practical means for perfecting ourselves in the spirit of penance and mortification, in the spirit of prayer and divine union, and lastly, in ardent zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls . . .

We have understood that all the customs in use in our holy Order are in reality only means for advancing in that practical perfection which constitutes the Rule itself. We have seen obedience pointed out as the basis of the edifice in the first and fourth Chapters, and recommended in the last chapter as the beginning, the centre and the end of the whole Religious life, and by which our salvation is secured. Again, we have seen that the spirit of solitude and of silence, which is acquired by the practice of interior and exterior mortification, and which, by means of recollection, leads us to the spirit of prayer and union with God, is the greatest happiness to which we can aspire here below, since it makes us approach the felicity of the Saints in Heaven . . .

How can we meditate upon the Rule without appreciating the happiness of being able by its means to destroy self-love, our most cruel enemy; to overcome nature, which exposes us to dangers so serious; to reduce our passions and to submit them to faith; to live no longer a base and carnal life, but the very life of God Himself? . . . How can we fail to understand better that this Rule is all-divine, divine in its institution, in its spirit and in its effects? . . . Divine, because it comes from God, because it has been given to us by His representative, the Patriarch St. Albert, and confirmed by the Vicar of Jesus Christ, Pope Innocent IV; divine, because the spirit of God is hidden beneath the sense of the letter; divine, because it conducts us surely to God, if we follow it faithfully and know how to put aside creatures and ourselves. What is more proper to make us appreciate the grace which our Lord has given us by subjecting us to it! . . . This holy Rule is for us the way which leads to God, the light which guides our steps, the rampart under the shelter of which we can brave, and even destroy our enemies; in fine, the means of salvation by which we reach our end, which is God.

We have been created to know, to love and serve our good God; the time of this life ought, then, to be employed in this triple exercise: the practice of our Rule will furnish us with the means of doing so, and its spirit will make it singularly easy. Yes, everything in our holy Rule disposes and aids us to know God: separation from creatures, detachment from self, renunciation of all that

is not divine; is not this what all the Masters of the spiritual life, who have been instructed at the school of the Holy Spirit, recommend as absolutely necessary to arrive at the knowledge of God? To see this sovereignly perfect Being in all things, it is necessary to have a pure heart. "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God." Now, the heart is pure only in as much as there is found in it nothing strange, nothing terrestrial . . .

Moreover, our holy Rule obliges us to meditate continually; and it is by meditation, by prayer, that the soul acquires a more perfect knowledge of God and of His attributes, that it becomes inflamed with the love of a God so amiable . . . Again, our holy Rule prescribes numberless spiritual exercises; it forms of us, for the service of the Sovereign Majesty, an elite militia which combats under the orders and in the company of our Lord Jesus Christ against the world, the flesh, the devil, and self-love . . . Whence it follows that the faithful observance of our Rule, by causing us to know, to love and to serve God, gives us the assurance of the possession of God in time and in eternity, since it is upon these conditions that eternal life is promised to us . . .

Is it not a great happiness to find in our Rule that which is found with so much difficulty in the world? O poor inhabitants of Babylon! poor worldlings! poor travellers! what false paths lead them astray! How many enemies delude and deceive them! What precipices on the way along which they venture, and how many there are to thrust them into them! How poor they are in means of salvation, but what abundant means of perdition! How many creatures take in their heart the place of Him Whom they neither know, nor love, nor serve! . . . There is nothing to place them upon the right way, everything withdraws them from it: how they are to be pitied! What more have we done for God that He should give us so great a grace as to withdraw us from the way of perdition, to place us in that of salvation, preferably to so many other souls? Oh! how culpable we shall be if, through our own fault, this grace becomes useless to us! Let us testify our gratitude to God in all manner of ways, but, above all, by our fidelity and exactitude in following the Rule which He has given us. Let us, then, meditate

upon it, let us love it, let us practise it, with all the zeal and fervor of which we are capable.

SECOND POINT.

If anyone chooses to do more than is herein prescribed, God when He comes to judge, will reward Him . . ."

These words make known to us with what fervor we ought to apply ourselves to the study and the practise of our holy Rule; for in order to arrive at the practice of that which is superfluous it is necessary to have already attained the perfection of that which is obligatory. For this purpose it is necessary not to lose time with trifles; but to keep up our fervor so as to neglect nothing of that which we know to be conformable to the Rule and its spirit, which, being entirely contrary to nature and self-love, necessarily presents great difficulties which a tepid and languishing soul will never surmount.

In effect, without fervor, can one live continually in subjection to another, renounce with a willing heart her own will and judgment, without falling back upon self? . . . How, without fervor, can we practise, in spirit and in truth, the perfection of real poverty, which despoils us absolutely of all that it is possible to possess here below, and to which man, without a very great grace, attaches himself so easily? . . . How, without fervor, can we renounce all human affection, all natural enjoyment, and preserve our heart pure and free, that God alone may be Master of it? . . . How can we condemn ourselves for life to solitude and continual silence, which deprive us of all the delights of society, of all the enjoyments which the mind procures from the conversation of amiable and well-educated persons? . . . How can we war against self without relaxation and reduce it to nothingness by renunciation and mortification? . . . How, without fervor, can we subject ourselves to all the regulations and observances of our holy Order, without listening to the false pretexts which nature and its inclinations present to us to make us neglect them, at one time in one point, again in another? . . . It is evident that without fervor a life such as ours is insupportable, impracticable, and without profit either for ourselves or for the glory of God.

Without fervor, we cannot know, understand, nor

practise the Rule with perfection, and consequently, much less can we do more than it ordains.

Since fervor is so necessary, and since without it we are only phantoms, vain shadows of Carmelites, without life or movement, it is important to know in what it consists, how we may acquire it, and how profit by it.

We must first remark that we do not here speak of sensible fervor, which is not absolutely necessary for our sanctification. God gives it to whom He will, and when it pleases Him, according as it may be useful and advantageous for His glory and the advancement of souls. It is not in our power to procure it for ourselves; we ought not even to seek it; but we should receive it with humility and gratitude when God deigns to favor us with it, and profit by it, according to the intention which this good Master had in bestowing it upon us. Sometimes it will even be necessary to mistrust it for fear that self-love may find therein some nourishment, particularly if it is excited by the spirit of darkness, or comes from our natural temperament or disposition. No, it is not that kind of fervor, so subject to illusion, which we wish here to study, to appreciate, and to acquire in a practical manner. It is a fervor which is real, solid, a little dry, perhaps, but rich in fruits of salvation; a fervor which we do not feel, which we do not relish, but which shows itself in works . . .

This fervor is diametrically opposed to tepidity. Just as tepidity dares to show itself by laxity, negligence, and even by the omission of a great number of religious duties, in the same way the fervor of which we speak, shows itself by exactitude, punctuality, and fidelity to all observances, even the smallest. If tepidity gives to natural instinct the first place, so that duty yields to it, fervor, acting in an opposite direction, requires natural instinct to give way on all occasions before duty. For fear of being constrained to follow it, tepidity avoids looking at the good pleasure of God in what contradicts, humbles and crucifies nature, while fervor seeks this good pleasure at its own expense and attaches itself to its accomplishment, cost what it may. Tepidity makes us see everything with the eyes of the body, and weighs all things in a balance favorable to self-love; fervor makes use of the eyes of faith alone and the balance of justice

which causes the glory of God and the accomplishment of His holy Will to prevail over all things.

The tepid soul is compared to water which is neither warm nor cold, and which provokes nausea. A fervent soul is compared to boiling water which, participating in the action of the fire which heats it, warms, softens, and dissolves the objects placed in it. It is the same with the fervent soul which is put in motion by the fire of divine love. That which seems hard and impracticable to the tepid soul, loses its hardness and becomes possible to the fervent. The difficulties with which the first meets and which hinder her in the way of virtue, are dissolved, in a certain sense, for the second, and leave her way free to attain perfection. While lukewarm water is never agitated, boiling water is always in action; it mounts up, contrary to its natural properties; it affects the objects placed therein, and overflows the vessel containing it. In the same manner a tepid soul does not act interiorly for God nor exteriorly for the edification of her neighbor, while, on the contrary, the fervent soul is unceasingly acting interiorly by her love for God, and this movement, showing itself exteriorly, produces acts of virtue contrary to natural inclination, glorifies God and edifies her neighbor.

Does this fervor depend upon us? Yes, if we beg of God this grace, which is never refused to the soul who asks for it with humility, confidence and a good will. No, if we think we can obtain it by our own efforts and without aid from on high, which is not due to us and which is only given through prayer and mortification. Yes, then, if we desire it greatly and with a sincere will: no, if we will it weakly, if we have only slight desires, and if we do not do on our part all that we can, which is a necessary condition that God may come to our aid.

What is the object of fervor? It seems to me that its action extends to everything that bears the impress of the Will of God, whether it be according to our taste or repugnant to it. Consequently it extends to the exact and faithful accomplishment of the letter and of the spirit of the Rule, to the customs of the Community, to actions prescribed by obedience, to events which are contrary and humiliating, to the practice of the Vows, of the religious virtues and those other virtues which God asks of us. The

action of fervor is shown particularly on occasions of sacrifice, when the will of God requires of us some act of renunciation; it imposes silence upon the passions, upon the movements of natural instinct; it recoils before no obstacle when there is question of duty; it sacrifices all rather than commit the least infidelity deliberately. Fervor extends its action beyond the limits prescribed by the Rule; it goes in advance of the good pleasure of God; it prevents the Will of God, that is to say, it seeks to discover if God does not ask of it something more than strict duty. After assuring itself that the inspirations which it receives upon this subject come from the Holy Spirit, it acts upon them.

THIRD POINT.

Let him, however, use discretion, which is the rule of all virtues.

It is to be understood that this recommendation concerns only the works of supererogation spoken of above, and which the fervent soul practises only after having faithfully observed her Rule. This supererogation should be understood to refer to exterior practices only; for it seems impossible that there could be in regard to interior exercises anything more elevated and more sublime than what is prescribed by our holy Rule, the spirit of which leads a soul to the highest contemplation, if she conforms herself to it with exactitude and love. There can be nothing of supererogation in the spirit of obedience, of detachment, of poverty, of renunciation, of prayer, of union with God, and of humility. In all this the Rule requires of us that which is most perfect, in order to attain its end, which is an intimate union of the soul with God. If there is no supererogation in all this, neither is there any discretion to be observed. *To do more* is understood, then, of exterior practices of penance, or other good works, the number of which may be augmented, or which may be added, under different forms, to those prescribed by the Rule, according to the inspiration of grace and the strength of each. It is this which must be done with discretion; for the Rule itself ought to be observed to the letter, unless necessity or obedience obliges us to accept some dispensation. Those who have drawn up the Rule have arranged its articles with the

greatest discretion; we, then, need only to observe them, without any other discretion.

As to the exterior practices which require moderation, there are many things to be considered in order to render them useful to us and glorious to God. We should see that the singularity, in which these practices place the soul, be not prejudicial to the common good. For this, one must assure herself, first, that certain minds will not feel sad and troubled, nor notably inconvenienced by them; secondly, that what is only a practice will not pass into a custom of the Rule; thirdly, that the little inconveniences which may result from them should not be more considerable than the good procured by these exterior practices of supererogation; fourthly, that they do not prevent the observance of what is of Rule. It would be an illusion, for example, if, by prolonging vigils beyond the fixed time, or by multiplying their number, we should put ourselves in a state unfit to make our morning prayer, or to recite the Office of the next day well; if, in order to give more time to prayer and to devotions, we neglect either work of obligation or recreation; if for private devotions, we leave solitude; if, under pretext of zeal for doing good to souls we fail in the rigorous silence prescribed at certain hours, etc., etc.

More over, these practices should not be such as to effect our health to a point that they render us incapable of following the Community life; for they ought to be conformable to the spirit of the Rule, without which they do not merit a recompense, but rather a chastisement, as being a veritable disorder. Again, these works of supererogation should not disturb the common order, and should not be prejudicial to the humility of the person who performs them; finally, they should be according to the Will of God, and this should have been well ascertained. It is discretion which judges, which weighs, and which regulates all this.

It is easy to understand that all these details are much more the affair of Superiors than of inferiors. I might almost dare to say that it even belongs to Superiors alone to regulate practices of supererogation of inferiors, to decide whether they ought to do them or not, to what extent, the number of times, in what circumstances, etc.; they know what God asks of each soul; they alone, then, ought to grant or refuse these particular permissions. As

to myself, a simple Religious, I place my discretion in obedience; in humble submission to my Prioress; in a spirit of faith; in the study of the movements of my soul and the action of God in it; in a very simple and sincere desire of knowing His designs in my regard; in my fidelity to render an exact account of all that takes place in my soul, to those who, for me, are the representatives of God upon earth, and afterwards desiring only to know and to execute His Divine Will, and relying upon the help of His grace. After that I have nothing more to examine or weigh; obedience guides me; its advice, its decisions suffice to make me embrace with a willing heart that which, through them, I know God asks of me, however contrary it may be to my natural reason and to my human prudence. To them it belongs to judge, to weigh and to decide; to me it belongs to act in all confidence and humility by abandoning myself to their decision . . . In this way works of supererogation cannot but be advantageous because, being in the order willed by God, they procure His glory.

But let us not forget that in order *to do more*, as we are counselled, we ought first to study, love and practise with fervor our holy Rule in all its perfection. Above all, let us not forget that we ought first to establish our soul upon a basis of solid humility, self-abnegation, charity, and a generous abandonment into the hand of God, in order to seek only His glory. Again, we should remark that discretion ought to put us on our guard against all natural eagerness for works of supererogation, against our imagination which is so easily excited, against the deceits of the devil, etc.

But, again I repeat, if I make known to those who hold in my regard the place of God, to whom I belong, I have need of no other discretion; I can, with all assurance, do, or not do, what they tell me is, or is not, according to the order of God. I believe firmly that if, of my own will, I add an iota to the Rule, I will not draw any profit from it, I will not have the grace to accomplish it: while, if legitimate authority doubles or trebles for me all that is most painful in it, I will have the grace to do it and God will be glorified by it. Amen.

LAUS DEO
VIRGINIQUE MATRI.

